

Fall 2009

THE MIND'S EYE

A Liberal Arts Journal

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

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By David L. Langston

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Triumph of the Revolution

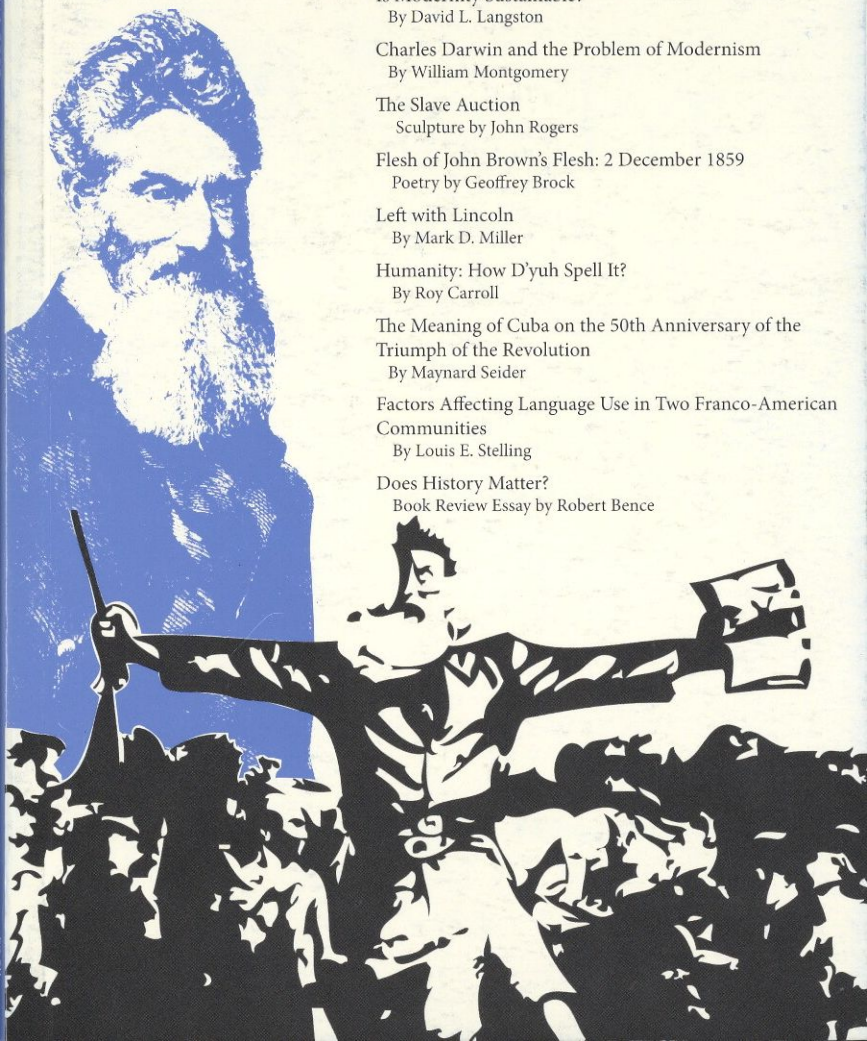
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Book Review Essay by Robert Bence



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Editor's File

"The crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood."

—John Brown, December 2, 1859

In the Fall 2009 issue, three articles discuss aspects of the year 1859, one article discusses French-Canadian immigrants, while another analyzes the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. The focus article in this issue deals with the importance of education in humanities at the college level. Finally, a book review essay on Abraham Lincoln and an original poem about the firebrand of 1859, John Brown, round out the issue.

David L. Langston, in "Is Modernity Sustainable? One Hundred and Fifty Years of the Myth of Modernity," writes about the importance and significance of modernity in the 21st century. William Montgomery discusses the father of modernism in "Charles Darwin and the Problem of Modernism" and the problems that resulted as a consequence of modernism. Mark Miller's "Left with Lincoln: The Lessons of John Brown and the Civil War for Barack Obama and the 21st Century," compares one of the most important events of the 19th century to a groundbreaking event of the 21st century. In "Humanity: How D'yuh Spell It?" Roy Carroll writes about the importance of liberal education in the academy, while Maynard Seider, in "The Meaning of Cuba on the 50th Anniversary of the Triumph of the Revolution," writes about the significance of a modern revolution. Louis Stelling, in "Factors Affecting Language Use in Two Franco-American Communities," discusses how nearly one million French-Canadian immigrants formed tightly knit communities throughout the northeastern United States and maintained their language through the creation of French-speaking institutions and social networks. Robert Bence's book review essay on Abraham Lincoln and Geoffrey Brock's poem on John Brown complete the issue.

Frances Jones-Sneed, *Managing Editor*

Is Modernity Sustainable?

One Hundred and Fifty Years of the Myth of Modernity

BY DAVID L. LANGSTON

By any measure, 1859 was a remarkable year, for within its brief span there occurred an array of extraordinary events that profoundly shaped the development of the modern world. Not only did Charles Darwin publish *On the Origin of the Species* and Karl Marx present a theory of the economic determination of history in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* but oil started flowing from the first commercial wells in Titusville, Pennsylvania, and John Brown staged his raid on Harper's Ferry, an event that presaged America's Civil War. Equally, the underpinnings of international modernization were being created as the French commenced digging the Suez Canal and the British reorganized their empire following the calamity of the Sepoy Rebellion in 1857. In the world of letters, Charles Baudelaire completed "The Swan," perhaps his most important poem in *Fleurs du Mal*, a landmark book in modern poetry, and George Eliot published her pioneering novel, *Adam Bede*. Our Nig, the first novel by an African-American woman, Harriet Wilson, was published. Among painters, Frederic Church exhibited *Heart of the Andes*, a large-canvas landscape in his series of epic celebrations of the

sublime forces of nature, and Albert Bierstadt packed up his Conestoga wagon for a yearslong western journey that eventually produced his own celebrations of the grandeur of raw nature in *Looking Down Yosemite Valley* or *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*. The biblical scholar Karl Graf offered an early version of the documentary hypothesis for biblical authorship by publishing his commentary on *Chronicles*, and the Harvard biologist Louis Agassiz founded the Museum of Comparative Zoology.

The year 1859 also saw the appearance of other staples of modern life, intercollegiate athletics and the spread of psychology into the courtroom. For two decades, intercollegiate sports had been gaining adherents and popularity, and the first-ever intercollegiate competition—a rowing regatta at Lake Winnetoesaukee between Harvard and Yale in 1852—had ballooned into a college rowing association, College Union Regatta, established in 1858 (Guttmann 103). But in 1859, the rowing competition was reorganized to select athletes from the entire college, not from just a single rowing club. And college athletics further expanded in 1859 when students at Princeton organized the first baseball club and the first-ever intercollegiate baseball game was played in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, between Amherst College and Williams College (final score: Amherst, 73; Williams, 32). Elsewhere, in the courtroom, the first “temporary insanity” defense was mounted by a U.S. congressman, Daniel Sickles, who claimed to be innocent of killing his wife’s lover because he was so consumed with an “uncontrollable frenzy” that had caused a “brainstorm” of temporary madness, thereby rendering him innocent of shooting his victim in Lafayette Park across from the White House (Spiegel). The jury agreed, and Sickles was set free. (He later gave confirming evidence of his mental instability when he violated orders at the battle of Gettysburg and positioned his unit so that it was virtually wiped out.)

Like almost every year, 1859 also had its share of symbolic passages: Arthur Conan Doyle, Albert Dreyfus, John Dewey, Edmund Husserl and Henri Bergson were all born; Washington Irving died; Charles Sanders Peirce, the founder of American philosophical pragmatism, graduated from Harvard; and Horace Bushnell, a leading advocate of religious liberalism, retired.

It should be obvious that any focus on 1859 is itself a shorthand for wide-ranging changes that were under way throughout the 1850s and 1860s—from the surge in American literature in the early '50s to technological advances such as improving the sewing machine (the patent for the lockstitch shuttle was granted in 1859) to the development of mass warfare shortly before in

the Crimea and just afterward at Antietam. Midcentury was the time when changes that had been developing for decades lurched into public view and into organizational acknowledgment.

Perhaps the founding of the Chicago Board of Trade can serve as an illustration. Organized in 1848, the board was only a collection of individuals intent on trading wheat and other agricultural commodities that were just starting to move through the new Chicago railhead from recently settled midwestern farms. But as individuals, the traders could not keep up with the volume of commodities that had become a flood by 1859 (whereas only three million bushels of wheat moved through Chicago in 1854, the flow had increased to 10 million bushels in 1857 and 14 million bushels by 1860) (Lurie 16). Individual traders could neither monitor the quality of the commodities nor authenticate the quantities of grain or beef that were being bought and sold. To gain predictability and stabilize profits, the state of Illinois granted a charter in 1859 to the Board of Trade to serve as the agency for establishing and policing quality standards for the grains traded through the rail hub. The Board of Trade's transformation from an association of individuals to an organization with hierarchy, norms, methods and predictable consequences is part of a more widespread intellectual and social movement away from the charismatic individual toward a social organization that merges individuals into what Herman Melville called "the joint stock company" of the world.

Another marker of this pervasive change in public sensibility can be seen in the altered attitudes toward Niagara Falls (and, by extension, toward nature in general). Even the first published accounts of Niagara had treated the falls as an emblem of the natural wonders of the New World, and early visitors and enthusiasts reported that they were a sign, even the voice, of God's power. By the 1830s, attitudes toward the falls had acquired a quasiseccular overlay: Niagara Falls offered a ready-made experience of nature's sublime power that everyone should consider as the motivation for the new nation.¹ As talisman of the sublime—a transcendent experience combining inspiration, awe and terror—the falls were available after a railway journey. But a more telling dimension of this progressively conventional script is the role reserved for the all-too-human actor and observer as a mediator of the experience. The constant emphasis in the Niagara guidebooks and in the engravings that were available to be taken home as souvenirs was on the human presence that frames the

¹"The prodigies of nature came to be no touchstones of taste or emblems of the Christian God so much as signs of numinous power in the continent itself and in the new political order taking shape here" (Furtwangler 45).

experience: the entrepreneurs who made access to the falls possible, the heroic boatmen who steer their craft close to the cataract and the spectators whose labors have brought them to witness the spectacle (McKinsey 135–55). The Romantic nationalist traveler of the 1830s and '40s approached the falls with a preformed expectation: Undergoing the ordeal of travel to witness a sublime event, it was therefore important to emphasize the feelings of sublimity aroused by the event—and the descriptions by visitors to the falls assume a formulaic and sentimental character.²

But at midcentury, the aesthetic program changed. Whereas placing human observers with their carriages, parasols and constructions in the foreground had framed—and domesticated—the representation of the falls, now, in the closing years of the 1850s, the paintings of Frederic Church or Thomas Hill or DeWitt Clinton Boutelle followed a competing convention for depicting the sublime: emphasizing the sheer natural energy untrammelled by any human frame or civilizing structure. The only human mark in Church's painting *Niagara* (1857) or Boutelle's *Niagara Falls* (1861) is an uninhabited decorative folly placed near the falls in 1833. Thomas Hill locates the perspective of his *Niagara Falls* (1860) below the lip of the cataract where a tiny human figure, an Indian, witnesses the unrestrained energy pouring toward him.

Similarly, in Church's 1859 masterwork *Heart of the Andes*, the signs of human presence are attenuated by the imposing peaks that tower over them. *Andes* was only one of a large assortment of large-format landscapes that were placed on display in an arrangement that encouraged the spectators to become absorbed in the work, an aesthetic of romantic identification much like the tactics to be found in IMax or Cinerama projection theaters in our own time. Some impresarios of these 19th-century landscape displays distributed opera glasses to enable spectators to get a closer—and more restricted and self-absorbing—view. When *Heart of the Andes* was first exhibited in 1859 and thereafter on a national tour for several years, it was surrounded by enormous fabric drapery and screens that permitted only the canvas to be illuminated, and it attracted huge crowds who stood in line for hours to pay to view the work (Avery 52–72).

Altering the code for representing Niagara Falls thus belongs to a larger move away from regarding nature as a hospitable, even maternal, presence to which humanity could have recourse for inspiration and solace—the reality that Wordsworth has in mind when he declares in "Tintern Abbey" (1798)

²See Elizabeth McKinsey's *Niagara Falls: "Icon of the American Sublime"* for a fulsome and more nuanced description of the changing attitudes toward Niagara Falls.

that “nature never betrayed the heart that loved her”—to regarding nature as a farrago of impersonal forces that are “red in tooth and claw” and that give no quarter to human motives of sympathy or altruism.³

Captain Ahab's indignation that the natural universe might be indifferent or even malevolent is one of the main motives for the conflict in Herman Melville's 1851 prescient novel *Moby-Dick*. Stung by the knowledge that nature might betray the heart that loved her, Ahab, in his remonstrance during the tempest toward the novel's close, places him at the crossroads—or in the crosshairs—of this monumental shift in the cultural wisdom on the “nature of nature.”

I own thy speechless, placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me. In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here. Though but a point at best; whencesoe'er I came; wheresoe'er I go; yet while I earthly live, the queenly personality lives in me, and feels her royal rights. But war is pain, and hate is woe. Come in thy lowest form of love, and I will kneel and kiss thee; but at thy highest, come as mere supernal power; and though thou launchest navies of full-freighted worlds, there's that in here that still remains indifferent. (383)

But Captain Ahab's actions are fueled not by his indifference but by his rage at an inscrutable universe (he tells Starbuck in an earlier confrontation, “That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him”). And even though he might now regard his own “queenly personality” as the counterweight to the kingly forces of indifference that are arrayed against him, he has known all along that his opposition and his revenge cannot be exercised by a single individual. That project requires an adequate social organization, and one of his first moves on the voyage is to forge the crew into a community of purpose to master the forces of nature that dwarf and overwhelm the Romantic individual.

The processes of modernity that intersect in 1859 all intersect with Ahab's strategy: From the flow of grain through Chicago to the tidal energies coalescing for civil war, to the flow of oil from Pennsylvania to the flow of Niagara's cataract, the response assumed a similar contour—create social organizations to control and manage those impersonal forces. All of them—Chicago's Board of Trade,

³Characterizing nature as “red in tooth and claw” occurs in Alfred Tennyson's “In Memoriam,” and the phrase is often used as an analogue to Darwin's vision of natural selection as a blind process of endless adaptation to ever-changing and often harsh or brutal circumstances.

the conscripted mass armies of the Civil War, the city-planning commissions of Vienna and Paris, the professional scientific guilds that probed the mysteries of the biological sciences, the Niagara Falls Hydraulic Power and Manufacturing Company, the cartels for oil and wheat and beef that mushroomed in the last half of the 19th century, the labor unions, the professional associations, the corporations and mercantile combinations, the collegiate athletic programs—gave shape and direction to modernity that yielded a scope, authority and impact for modern society without historical precedent. If nature had been shown to be an unrestrained torrent, human organizations would respond to direct the torrent toward productive ends. Small wonder that lithographs and paintings of Niagara Falls were among the most popular forms of domestic decoration in the middle of the 19th century—to be supplanted three decades later by another icon of natural energy, Old Faithful.

The underlying assumption in this version of modernity is that natural energy is not only abundant but limitless.⁴ Once harnessed, natural energy from petroleum or hydro power or the steam engine, or eventually atomic fission, will supply energy that is “too cheap to meter,” to use a phrase that touted nuclear energy in its early days. For example, in *Capital*, Karl Marx suggests in his analysis of applying steam power to industrial production that steam engines have the potential to be linked together in a supermachine, or “automaton.” Such a development would place industry on a new plateau where the inexhaustible mechanical power derived from steam may one day reduce workers to slavlike caretakers of an inhuman mechanized monster. Modern industry, in other words, has at its disposal a form of power that is mobile and inexhaustible and requires human beings to reorganize the labor process to meet its demands: The “co-operative character of the labor process is in this case a technical necessity dictated by the very nature of the instrument of labor [the steam engine]” (Marx 508).

After 150 years of repeating that story of infinite natural resources for modernity in hundreds of versions, contemporary observers have empirical reasons to doubt both its veracity and its effectiveness. A few forecasts already place the exhaustion of the oil supply on our time horizon, but even should that supply prove to be practically limitless, the social and environmental costs of unrestrained carbon emissions seem unsustainable, and in various corners of

⁴Even the founding of the national parks adds an ironic twist to this narrative. The parks were founded to preserve the experience of “wildness” and “wilderness” for future generations before the direct cognition of natural energy would be rendered unavailable by the technological overlay that exploited its power.

global society, a reexamination of the strength and viability of a key master narrative of modernity—the limitless supply of natural energy—is under way.



In taking stock of the narratives of power and progress that have constituted this collective myth of modernity, it is worth keeping in mind the range of meanings for the term *modernity*, since it belongs to a family of terms with which it is frequently confused. There are at least four related terms that bear witness to these developments: *modern*, *modernizing*, *modernity* and *Modernism*. While their meanings overlap and there is consequently a healthy debate over the extension of and distinctions among the terms, there are some general distinctions worth observing.

Modern is an adjective that has been used since the Renaissance to distinguish a recent historical development from an “ancient” idea, practice or reality. Its widespread distribution and imprecise boundaries thus give the term *modern* a high degree of mobility. “Modern” lighting could refer to the introduction of gas lamps for urban illumination in the 19th century, or it could refer equally to the substitution of light-emitting diodes for incandescent bulbs in contemporary houses. The same analysis can be applied to terms such as “modern transportation,” “modern advertising” or “modern education.” “Modern” does not designate a specific period or historical threshold; it is instead an ever-moving threshold that compares a later, improved event (“modern medicine”) with an earlier and comparatively deficient similar event or practice.

The term *modernizing*, a comparable adjective, has also served a wide spectrum of purposes. It characterizes a society or institution (or cluster of institutions) in which modern developments have become a norm that measures the quality of that organization or social practice. “We are modernizing the water supply” suggests that a modern water system is an ideal or norm the various modifications of the ductwork will seek to emulate. Equally, if citizens who lament the condition of education say, “We are modernizing our educational system,” they may be leveling a critique at current fashions in pedagogy that systematically replace older, and presumably better, ones. A modernizing society is one that consistently exercises a preference for modern realities over equivalent more established practices, habits or institutions. *Modernizing* also carries associations with the application of science and engineering to technical questions and the enforcement of greater equality among individuals in social

institutions. So a "modernizing Europe," for example, characterizes a widely distributed set of innovations that organize and rationalize public functions such as transportation, septic systems, medicine, education and welfare with a governmental management that appeals to standards of equality and progress as its values.

Some of the greatest confusions over these terms arise when applying the term *Modernism*. By contrast with the portmanteau adjectives, this noun identifies an international philosophical and aesthetic movement that flourished in the decades before and after World War I. Arising as a reaction to the stultifying intellectual and artistic milieu of the 19th century that was dominated by a dilapidated aristocracy and its fawning bourgeois camp followers, the modernists self-consciously adopted an aggressively oppositional stance to a culture Ezra Pound would eventually call "an old bitch gone in the teeth . . . a botched civilization" ("Mauberley" 64). Rejecting the pieties of church, state and bourgeois conformity, the modernists sought to reanimate both art and life with the formless, nameless energies for which Nietzsche had used the term *Dionysian*. They considered all forms, whether artistic, social and governmental, personal or religious, as products of that force. To borrow Henry Adams's typology, behind or beneath every serene Virgin symbolizing compassion and benevolence there was a turbulent Dynamo whose restless energy was indifferent to social decoration, personal sacrifice or self-restraint. To address a self that was a mask for desire or a society that was a heap of congealed fragments held together by force or encrusted tradition, art could (and should) stage encounters with the primary creative motives and forces to refashion the world anew. Ezra Pound's mantra "Make It New" (*Make It New*) or Stephen Dedalus's resolve "to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" are serviceable epigrams for Modernism's critique of a modern and modernizing society that had lost its way (Joyce 299). Consequently, treating the modernists as though they were exemplars of modernizing tendencies can bewilder casual observers because the similarity in terminology often masks profound disagreements or conflicts in direction and emphasis. For Pound, "making it new" meant that lost or forgotten traditions would assume fresh relevance rather than be replaced by a newly minted "modern" concept or practice.

Modernity is the most relevant of the terms that can be brought to bear on the consequences of 1859. This fourth term not only incorporates dimensions of the other terms but has the added virtue of greater historical range

and specificity. Modernity is certainly “modern” in describing a world that stands on this side of a decisive threshold from an *ancien régime* that was more hierarchical, more dependent on traditional knowledge and traditional modes of authority and slower to accept novelty just for the sake of newness. From a very halting beginning in the 14th century, modernity has pressed its case on many fronts and profoundly reshaped the world, both literally and cognitively. Marshall Berman has eloquently summarized the plight into which modernity has propelled us and our progeny as well:

Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, “all that is solid melts into air.”

People who find themselves in the midst of this maelstrom are apt to feel that they are the first ones, and maybe the only ones, to be going through it; this feeling has engendered numerous nostalgic myths of a pre-modern Paradise Lost. In fact, however, great and ever-increasing numbers of people have been going through it for close to five hundred years. (15–16)

Modernity, in Berman’s analysis, persistently destabilizes ideas, personal identity, social institutions and our prospects for the future, creating new prospects even as it destroys current ones.

Modernity, then, is our name for a multidimensional transformation since the mid-19th century of almost every dimension of common experience—from political institutions to international trade, to education and competence credentialing for the professions, to manufacturing and electrical power, to policing, warfare and the penal system and, finally, to the profoundly elevated social status of hitherto marginal groups such as women or minorities. These and so many other changes have molded our contemporary social, material and intellectual life into an interlocking reality, each part of which depends on so many other dimensions of our experience for its very existence. Modernity has grown to define even the terms of survival for millions of people. At the same time, it has grown to seem monstrous to those threatened by its pervasive, all-

encompassing pressure.⁵ And even people who otherwise support modernity for its emancipatory potential are nonetheless troubled by its cumulative impact on the climate, on material resources and on the character of individual life.

With all of these questions that circle around modernity in mind, a group of faculty at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts organized a set of lectures and presentations during 2009 to evaluate the impact and assess the prospects for the culture of modernity over the past 150 years. A series of lectures and colloquia on the history of oil, on public education, on the implications of evolution, on the modern role of organized sports—and more particularly collegiate sports—on the global economy, on newly designed cityscapes, on changing standards for interpreting the Bible, on contrasting political models in John Brown and Abraham Lincoln and on the history of mathematics were all featured in a year of intellectual search and reevaluation of the prospects for modernity. These various meditations and presentations made it clear that the character of modernity has reached a crossroads. At the same time, we learned that modernity has produced a malleable social formation with cultural resources in depth. It would require an anthropologist's "thick description" to understand its multiple layers and overlapping assets for cultural reinvention (Geertz 3–30). We also confirmed what everyone suspected: It is impossible to think about the future by abandoning modernity's achievements and its problems, and like every effort to anticipate the future, we will doubtlessly be surprised. We will, against our will, find ourselves needing to cope with stunning vacancies, shocking arrivals, crushing departures and disconcerting epiphanies that none of us ever anticipated.

⁵Lawrence Wright argues that the career of Sayyid Qutb, the Egyptian writer whose diatribes would later fuel Islamic opposition to modernity, stemmed from Qutb's sense that modernity threatened to overwhelm any and all alternative modes of existence:

[Qutb's] central concern was modernity. Modern values—secularism, rationality, democracy, subjectivity, individualism, mixing of the sexes, tolerance, materialism—had infected Islam through the agency of Western colonialism. . . . His extraordinary project . . . was to take apart the entire political and philosophical structure of modernity and return Islam to its unpolluted origins. For him, that was a state of divine oneness, the complete unity of God and humanity. Separation of the sacred and the secular, state and religion, science and theology, mind and spirit—these were the hallmarks of modernity, which had captured the West. But Islam could not abide such divisions. (28)

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Charles Darwin and the Problem of Modernism

BY WILLIAM MONTGOMERY

The idea of modernism is closely tied to the idea of progress. To be modern is to advance beyond outdated ideas, outdated customs and outdated tools; it is to stand at the forefront of progressive development. Mid-19th-century Englishmen sometimes conceived of their own modernity as a product of steam technology and the great textile mills that gave them such an economic advantage over other human societies. Chinese or Indian civilizations might be more ancient, but those peoples could not match the industrial skills that bestowed power and wealth on Europeans. It was easy for Victorians to imagine that they had risen to world leadership through an almost inevitable process of advancement that testified to their moral and cultural superiority to other nations (Adas). Not surprisingly, when scientists began to consider theories of biological species transmutation—by which they meant the emergence of higher species over time—they quite naturally associated this development with the signs of economic progress they saw around them.

In the early 19th century, Jean Baptiste Lamarck in France (*Zoological Philosophy*) and the anonymous Robert Chambers in Scotland (*Vestiges*) proposed

theories of transmutation that were taken seriously by scientists and laypersons alike. Both theories explained the origin of new species as the result of progressive modification of existing forms, not of individual creation. The beauty of these theories was that they described processes of biological advance that might merge seamlessly with theories of human cultural progress. If Lamarck and the unknown author of *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* were right, biological development represented a natural prelude to the growth of enlightened understanding that gradually emerged over the course of human history. Although nature operated according to unconscious processes, it set the stage for the goal-directed ascent of human mastery that evoked so much cultural pride among Victorians.

The other great theory of transmutation, that of Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, implied a broad measure of progress too, but its relationship to human moral advancement was more problematic (Darwin and Wallace). Darwin's book *On the Origin of Species* marshaled the evidence for what came to be known as evolution so effectively that most scientific opponents of the idea in Western Europe and North America fell silent within a decade. However, Darwin and Wallace both identified evolution with the idea of natural selection, a process that seemed to reflect no moral consequence at all, simply the odd good fortune of being able to adapt. Both Darwin and Wallace were impressed by the population theorist Robert Malthus, a man who considered human progress very unlikely, and something of Malthus's pessimism clung to the idea of natural selection as well. Wallace eventually decided that the development of the human mind must somehow have proceeded through spiritual means without the intervention of selection (Shermer 158–73). Darwin argued, on the contrary, that human moral conduct was entirely consistent with selection. However, despite his very idealistic vision of the modern, Darwin's logic of struggle and survival carried him toward the popular imperialist attitudes shared by many Victorians.

The lesson that Darwin drew from Malthus concerned birth and survival: "[A]s more individuals are produced than can possibly survive, there must in every case be a struggle for existence, either one individual with another of the same species, or with the individuals of a distinct species, or with the physical conditions of life" (*Origin* 63). Malthus had treated birthrates as a public-policy issue and a moral question: Given unchecked population growth, could governments ever really hope to eliminate human poverty? Darwin, as a naturalist, had a different question: How would high birthrates contribute to a struggle

for existence, and how would this struggle affect the multitude of heritable variations that existed in any natural population? The effect he thought would be very much like the effect of a plant or animal breeder's selecting favorable variants in an effort to reproduce the most desirable strain of organisms. Given enough time, such selection could establish new biological forms as exemplified by the many agricultural breeds maintained by astute farmers. Unlike farmers, nature had no specific preference among natural forms; however, not all forms were equally prepared for survival. Those best adapted to the circumstances of life would thrive, reproduce and perhaps someday generate successful daughter forms. The poorly adapted would perish.

The idea of a struggle for existence was already well established before Darwin read Malthus. Scientists had even come to recognize that the struggle might lead to extinction for many species; however, their conception of the struggle had no obvious relevance for evolution. In the early 19th century, everyone assumed that one species might struggle with others for space and for nourishment. Although failure in that the struggle might obliterate a species, no one thought that the struggle might alter the species. When Charles Lyell presented the accepted interpretation of struggle among species in chapter 8 of his *Principles of Geology*, he reminded his readers of the enormous numbers of fossil remains testifying to the extinction of former species. He considered the possibility that species might be subject to some inner deterioration or senescence causing them to decline and disappear over time. However, he recognized that there was no decisive evidence supporting such an idea and suggested instead that every plant occupies a natural "station" where it is able to find a climate and physical resources that meet its needs. At the same time, it has to confront potential invaders that threaten to displace it from these favorable circumstances. To succeed it needs not just physical resources but living allies—animals, perhaps—that assist it by feeding upon its rivals or larger plants that shield it from its own predators. Lyell noted especially the power of insects to destroy plants on a large scale, thus creating opportunities for other plants. By the same token, birds that destroy insects complicate the picture even further. In this way, Lyell depicted the relations among species as an unstable balance, always subject to change, bringing success now to one species and now another (128-40).

Darwin agreed with Lyell about the impact of species on one another in the struggle for existence. However, he explained this process very differently. Instead of dwelling on the relations between one species and another, Darwin emphasized the relations among individuals of the same species. Thus, when

it got cold and food was scarce, survival meant outcompeting one's fellows for access to limited resources. Under particularly difficult conditions, an entire species might become extinct, but the more common effect was for some members to survive by relying on their peculiar hereditary strengths. Darwin recognized that members of unrelated species might affect one another greatly; he noted the effect of predators in harming one species while furthering the cause of another. He even recognized the capacity of species to assist one another in the manner of insects' feeding on the pollen and nectar of flowers while carrying out the all-important task of transporting pollen from one flower to another. However, by concentrating on individual competition, he redefined the concept of struggle, granting it the power to modify the hereditary characteristics of a species and thus transforming that species over time (*Origin* 62–70, 91–95).

As a consequence of this struggle, nature might stand in for the breeder and choose, or “select,” outstanding individuals to reproduce the next generation. Breeders who favored a particular set of characteristics in their breeding stock and avoided matches that detracted from their goals could strengthen those characteristics to the point of creating a new breed or variety. Darwin argued that nature, by destroying individuals that lacked characteristics with positive survival value, could do much the same—altering individuals even to the point of producing a new species. He did not arrive at this opinion all by himself: The naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace proposed a very similar theory in 1858, making them codiscoverers. However, Darwin's backlog of research enabled him to outpace Wallace and produce his great book *On the Origin of Species* the following year. It was this book that captured the imagination of the scientific world—at least to the extent of convincing most scientists that evolution had, in fact, taken place (Darwin and Wallace).

Darwin differed from Wallace in that Darwin believed the idea of selection applied to domesticated animals just as it did to animals in the wild. In the very first chapter of *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin asked his readers to consider the Victorian hobby of breeding fancy pigeons. Most practicing breeders gathered at two London pigeon-breeding clubs, one for gentlemen, one for working men, where they could exhibit their birds and discuss their techniques. Darwin joined both clubs, bought birds and raised them himself. The birds exhibited extraordinary peculiarities of habit and appearance; and the breeders assumed that every breed had descended from a separate species, as well they might have, since the hobby extended as far back as ancient Egypt. Nevertheless, when

Darwin crossed some of his own birds, he was able to obtain feathers that clearly resembled those of the common rock pigeon (*Origin* 20–29). He concluded that fancy pigeons, like other domestic breeds, were all the product of active selection on the part of breeders. He did not think the work had been done by modern experts: Many early breeders must have acted simply to reproduce favored animals. Still, as long as the standards of excellence were shared over the generations, even unconscious selection might steadily improve a breed over time and generate a distinctive plant or animal. Sooner or later, natural variation would offer breeders an opportunity to make improvements, and with enough time they could produce something as odd as a pouter or a fantail (*Origin* 30–43).

Darwin also expanded the idea of selection in a way that did not occur to Wallace: He applied it to reproduction. In Darwin's eyes, reproductive success was critical to the evolution of new forms because traits that were not passed from one generation to the next would simply disappear. An animal or plant that failed to reproduce would lose out to more fecund rivals, and its distinctive characteristics would be lost. As a result, any feature that assisted an animal or plant in reproduction would enjoy an advantage over competitors without that feature. Darwin was thinking of features such as bright coloration in male birds that seemed to have no survival benefit and, indeed, probably detracted from survival. If female birds preferred males with bright colors, those males would be more successful at reproduction and triumph over their dull-colored competitors even though they might suffer more frequent loss of life. The same consideration might apply to males that had to fight for access to females: Such males would benefit from horns and tusks that might be of no practical benefit other than to drive away other males (*Origin* 87–90).

Selection had one additional function that seemed very important to Darwin: It provided him with a theory of extinction. From his geological research, Darwin was acutely aware of the enormous numbers of extinct species preserved in the fossil record. Although he knew that every species faced constant dangers within the environment, he did not attribute extinction primarily to environmental threats. Instead, he theorized that extinction must be due to the emergence of new species. Any successful new species would naturally compete with already existing species for the resources of life, making their place in nature increasingly precarious. With time, the new, better-adapted species would expand in numbers while older, less-well-adapted forms would decline and eventually disappear. In this sense, Darwin still believed in Charles Lyell's

idea of a struggle between varieties and species. Selection acted not only on individuals but on varieties and species as well. Just as species modification produced new divergent species to the tree of life, it eliminated older forms, pruning especially those that most resembled the new successors (*Origin* 109–26).

Two features of Darwin's theory proved disturbing to many scientific observers. First, the process required no forethought or planning nor any design as understood by natural theology. It was simply a natural consequence of variation and the struggle for existence carried out over millennia as the stresses of the natural environment pressed now one way and now another. Many religious scientists were quite troubled by the idea that the world might have come into existence and even have produced highly developed animals and rational human beings without the intervention of a Creator. They knew that the world was very old. Decades of geological research convinced them that the six-day creation story could not be interpreted literally, though they still reserved a role for God in its creation. Darwin's old teacher, the Cambridge geologist Adam Sedgwick, concluded his review of *On the Origin of Species* in characteristically blunt language:

But I cannot conclude without expressing my detestation of the theory, because of its unflinching materialism;—because it has deserted the inductive track, the only track that leads to physical truth;—because it utterly repudiates final causes, and thereby indicates a demoralized understanding on the part of its advocates. (166)

Sedgwick was no biblical literalist, but he saw the hand of God in nature and expected his colleagues to see it, too. When Darwin failed to do so, Sedgwick rejected the *Origin* as both bad science and bad faith.

Even people who agreed with Darwin's materialism found natural selection troubling. In a letter to Frederick Engels, Karl Marx observed snidely, "It is remarkable how Darwin rediscovers, among the beasts and plants, the society of England with its division of labor, competition, opening up of new markets, 'inventions' and Malthusian 'struggle for existence'" (381). Marx obviously had no use for Malthus's ideas, which he considered simply bourgeois propaganda aimed at the working poor. However, many social conservatives who abhorred Marx could find common ground with him when it came to the moral implications of Darwin's theory. The Reverend Samuel Haughton, professor of geology at Trinity College, Dublin, observed about the idea of selection, "This notable

argument is borrowed from Malthus's doctrine of Population, and will, no doubt, find acceptance with those Political Economists and Pseudo-Philosophers who reduce all the laws of action and human thought habitually to the lowest and most sordid motives" (222).

Darwin found such assertions irritating. He complained to his friend Charles Lyell about a *Manchester Guardian* story "showing that I have proved 'might makes right,' & therefore that Napoleon is right & every cheating Tradesman is also right—" (*Correspondence* 189). It is easy to see how the journalist might have drawn this conclusion, for *On the Origin of Species* is very firm about the importance of competition among members of the same species. To be sure, Darwin did suggest that it is "useful to the community" for bees to sacrifice themselves by delivering a sting or for a queen bee to destroy potential young rivals (*Origin* 202–03). However, he made no effort to expand on this point or apply the idea to human moral concerns. As far as he was concerned, *On the Origin of Species* was all about plant and animal species, and although he conceded that his work might apply to humans in some sense, he made no specific claims about how humans dealt with the struggle for existence (488).

A dozen years later, Darwin finally addressed the subject of human evolution in *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1881), and when he did so, he left no question that he believed in human moral sensibility, naturalistic though it might be. Darwin thought human beings had inherited social instincts, which, combined with human intelligence, afforded them with a conscience, an inner monitor encouraging behavior for the good of the community. Animals inherited the same social instincts, though without the powerful assist of human intelligence (*Descent* 71–73). He detailed numerous stories by naturalists and others of animals that offered sympathy and protection to those of their own kind, sometimes even at individual risk (*Descent* 74–84). At the same time, he made clear that the bounds of sympathy were limited to family members or other creatures in the same group, not to all members of the species (*Descent* 85). This was in keeping with his essential belief that the struggle for existence always created conflicts of interest among creatures of the same kind.

However, Darwin did not think that man was guided by instinct alone. Given the existence of basic sociability and intelligence, even primitive man was guided by the views of his community. In the earliest human past, the will of the group was frequently overridden by selfish impulses; but with the passage of time, both sociability and intelligence grew stronger, paving the way for

the elevated moral judgment of a Kant (*Descent* 86). Unlike the lower animals, man reflected constantly on mental images; they were inescapable marks of his human status. On any given occasion, he may behave well or badly, but when he behaves badly, he must contend with the memory of the event and his continued discomfort at his own failure to come up to the standards of community judgment. "Man will then feel dissatisfied with himself, and will resolve with more or less force to act differently for the future. This is conscience; for conscience looks backward and judges past actions" (*Descent* 91). . . .

Darwin's discussion of conscience relates to the criticism he often received from religious critics such as Sedgwick and Haughton. They considered his theory a threat to faith, propaganda for an amoral materialism that offered no obstacles to crass selfishness. To be sure, Darwin discussed ethics largely in secular terms. He tended to neglect religious admonitions regarding proper conduct except for an occasional criticism of what he took to be unreasonable superstition on the part of non-Christian believers. However, his discussion of conscience made clear that he took moral judgment and moral behavior seriously. He recognized that admirable behavior rested on a substrate of inherited instinct, something we share with our animal forebears; but he went on to emphasize the importance of personal reflection and social criticism as the basis of moral conduct. As far as human conduct was concerned, we thought we owed our virtues to the collective standards of our community and our willingness to examine ourselves and face up to our shortcomings.

Darwin thought that among primitive people, conscience functioned largely for the benefit of one's own tribe; and he described at some length the kind of violence and cruelty that primitive people sometimes directed at outsiders. He also considered them licentious. In all, he thought that the restriction of sympathy to members of one's own tribe along with weak reasoning and limited self-control were responsible for the immorality of savages, people lodged at the earlier stages of human development (*Descent* 97). With time, however, human behavior continued to improve:

But as man gradually advanced in intellectual power and was enabled to trace the more remote consequences of his actions; as he acquired sufficient knowledge to reject baneful customs and superstitions; as he regarded more and more not only the welfare but the happiness of his fellow-men; as from habit, following on beneficial experience, instruction, and example, his sympathies became more tender and widely diffused, so as to extend to the men of all races, to the imbecile,

the maimed, and other useless members of society, and finally to the lower animals,—so would the standard of his morality rise higher and higher. (*Descent* 103)

Darwin did not invent all these ideas; many of them were, in fact, the standard fare of an important school of English anthropologists who emerged in the 1860s. Inspired partly by new archaeological discoveries and partly by reports from Europeans (including Darwin himself) who had traveled abroad, these anthropologists proposed a progressive history for mankind that went well beyond the idea of progress common among Enlightenment *philosophes* and liberal ideologues. That idea was based mostly on historical accounts detailing the rise of secular rationalism and representative government within European experience. In the 1860s, John Lubbock, Edward B. Tylor and John McLennan redefined the idea on a worldwide scale and extended it back in time to a point for which the only remaining evidence was stone tools and skeletons. By the 1830s, European geologists had developed techniques for dating geological strata relative to one another. Soon evidence began to appear in Britain, France, Germany and Switzerland that humans might have lived well before any known civilization. Indeed, in 1858, while Darwin was still composing *On the Origin of Species*, British quarry workers discovered a cave that contained remarkable stone tools embedded among bones of animals long extinct anywhere in Europe (Stocking 72–74).

Before long, Darwin's friend and neighbor John Lubbock was intently studying early remains of human settlement and activity both in England and on the Continent. Lubbock coined the terms "paleolithic" and "neolithic" to designate earlier and later stages of Stone Age man, a designation based principally on improvements in the quality of stone tools. However, when it came to describing the lives of prehistoric people, he did not stop with fossil evidence. He combed the accounts of modern travelers, those who had visited the world's most primitive peoples, for information about their customs, beliefs and possessions. Lubbock regarded these isolated peoples as stand-ins for the ancient ancestors of the entire human race, and drew his conclusions about early human life from their simple circumstances and conduct. The portrait he drew was not always flattering. Early people had little control over nature and, as a result, lived short, squalid lives. Understanding little of the world, they contented themselves with crude superstitions and treated one another with brutish incivility. It was an unattractive image of early man, not one that most

people would happily select for an ancestor. Within a few years, though, Lubbock reconsidered his initial negative account to remove some of the darker claims. His new image of early man was still primitive but no longer brutish. Even at that early time, people were capable of basic rationality and moral reflection. They were not animals but men and they shared with one another a common potential for further progress (Stocking 150–56).

Lubbock was soon joined by two other investigators who shared his assumption that they could reconstruct the path of human progress by comparisons among still-living populations. Edward Burnett Tylor arranged the Australians, Tahitians, Aztecs, Chinese and Italians in a hierarchy of ascending cultural achievement. At every stage, he thought that remnants, or “survivals,” of earlier customs still persisted, providing the investigator with guides to the earlier history of the group. He considered folklore a particularly useful example of such survivals, and he combed European folklore for hints about the rise of what he took to be the world’s most advanced peoples (Stocking 156–63). John McLennan took a slightly different approach. Instead of the broad comparison of customs undertaken by Tylor, he chose to focus on a single important group of customs, those relating to marriage and reproduction. McLennan assumed that among the earliest humans there was no marriage and people mated promiscuously. Since parentage would be recognizable only through the mother, a system of polyandry would emerge. Polygamy and monogamy came only later as tribal organization was better established. These ideas provided a framework for cultural progress overall (Stocking 164–69).

The new anthropology shared important assumptions with Christian tradition, and John Lubbock remained a faithful member of the Church of England to the end of his days. His anthropological belief in a common primitive past for all peoples matched the biblical story of Adam and Eve in the garden. Not only did they spring from common parents but Lubbock’s primitives were a sinful lot, given to murder, cannibalism and promiscuity. Once they began to improve themselves, they adopted patriarchy and eventually even monogamy, just the sort of life that an Anglican vicar or his respectable landholding neighbor might recommend. It was a vision that a Christian modernist might embrace, consistent with the most recent scientific evidence and yet evocative of beloved scriptural authority.

Not all believers agreed with Lubbock’s happy interpretation of the human past. George Douglas Campbell, the Duke of Argyll, spoke for many Christians when he rejected Lubbock’s depiction of early humans as unwashed primitives.

Argyll believed fervently in natural theology. In his opinion, every feature of living beings was uniquely crafted by God for the benefit of those beings (Gillespie 93–104). Consequently, in 1868, he felt obliged to reply to Lubbock in a series of articles that was later collected in a short book (1873). Argyll was not a biblical literalist; indeed, he willingly sacrificed the popular creationist notion that the world was only a few thousand years old; and throughout his debate with Lubbock, he made every effort to offer an account of the human past that would square with the evidence. He was even willing to entertain the possibility of human evolution, but he insisted that the first true humans must have been farmers and herders, just as they are presented in *Genesis*. They could not have been the naked hunter-gatherers that Lubbock had in mind.

Argyll's case against traditional biblical chronology rested on the hard facts of human racial difference. If the creation took place only a few thousand years ago, how could the human races have evolved? After all, no one had ever seen evidence that residence in a tropical climate had the least effect on the skin color or facial features of Europeans. Any change of that kind must have taken place exceedingly slowly. In fact, ancient Egyptian illustrations, drawn in biblical times, depicted black Africans who looked identical to the Africans of Argyll's own time. There was a possible explanation for this fact, and some anthropologists urged that the different races had all been created separately, that they were actually separate species. This polygenist interpretation of the human past was often advanced by physicians and anatomists as a justification for African slavery; however, it required them to repudiate the *Genesis* story, and Argyll refused to touch it. He opted instead to accept the far older chronology of the human past that geologists had discovered, a chronology that John Lubbock had also endorsed. This allowed him to preserve the spirit of the biblical creation story with its message of a common humanity while explaining the human races as the products of a slow modification extending back into geological time (Argyll 97–107, 124–28).

Regardless of his opinion of chronology, Argyll did believe in a Garden of Eden: In his opinion, the first humans must have evolved—or been set down—in the world's most bountiful lands. In contrast, he claimed that most modern primitives inhabited distant, inhospitable lands with few resources to sustain civilization, which led him to conclude that they must be survivors of weak tribes that had been driven from more favorable territory by stronger groups. The Inuit in the far north struck him as the ideal type of such failed tribes, people clinging to the only piece of continental landmass they could call their

own simply because no one else wanted it. Argyll thought Fuegians, living at the southern tip of South America, were another failed tribe; and he backed his argument by wickedly reproducing almost every detail of Charles Darwin's own description of their grim existence. Lubbock thought such people must have been stalled in such situations by difficult environments that blocked their advance. Argyll insisted that it made just as much sense to assume that they had declined from a better life when they were forced into these environments (Argyll 155–74; Darwin *Voyage* Ch. 10).

The dustup between Lubbock and Argyll put Darwin in an awkward spot. Lubbock was his friend and loyal follower, while Argyll believed in natural theology. However, Darwin had reservations about progress that paralleled those of Argyll, doubts that centered on John F. McLennan's rather speculative theory of marriage. Darwin was aware that some primitive tribes practiced polygamy, and he was likewise aware of even very primitive people who seemed monogamous. Indeed, given male jealousy, he was really quite doubtful whether communal marriage could survive at all, among either primates or humans. A faithful husband and father of ten children, he may have felt uncomfortable with the risqué hypothesis of the anthropologists. As a biologist, keenly aware of the competitive struggle for reproductive success, he thought the idea just did not make evolutionary sense. Savages might be licentious, but they were not promiscuous. The distinction—almost no distinction at all in common usage—was enormously important to Darwin, for it rested on the difference between cooperative and competitive behavior. He considered successful reproduction so great a prize that it must have led to a struggle. After all, why did male primates have such big teeth, and why did they use these teeth so freely to threaten one another? Since primates exhibited both monogamy and polygamy, just as humans do, these were the only plausible starting points for subsequent human progress (*Descent* 358–63).

By the time Darwin got through with McLennan's—and Lubbock's—theory, human progress began to look like a far more modest achievement. Competitive struggle was fundamental to his theory, and it applied to humans and animals alike. At the same time, Darwin had no use for Argyll's static vision of racial degeneration. He was willing to concede that the Fuegians might have been driven into their bleak homeland by more powerful neighbors, but he could not see that their culture was any more primitive than that of the Botocudos, who were comfortably ensconced in lush Brazil. Darwin fully accepted McLennan and Tylor's argument that civilized people everywhere retained cultural traces.

of their barbarian past, and he was especially impressed by the isolated civilizations of Mexico and Peru, which could only have been home grown (*Descent* 181–84). Darwin was not a creationist, and he required genuine progress to account for the very obvious moral capacities of civilized people. Somehow or other, competitive human beings must have learned to sacrifice personal advantage in favor of the needs of others. To explain this progress, Darwin simply reminded his readers that selection applied to groups and not simply to individuals.

When two tribes of primeval man, living in the same country, came into competition, if the one tribe included (other circumstances being equal) a greater number of courageous, sympathetic, and faithful members, who were always ready to warn each other of danger, to aid and defend each other, this tribe would without doubt succeed best and conquer the other. (*Descent* 162)

The difficulty of such a process was obvious. No matter how successful the morally superior tribe might become, its most moral members would nevertheless perish in larger numbers than their more ordinary companions. In the end, there would be no way to sustain the group success. However, Darwin thought he saw two possible solutions to this problem. First, as humans became more intelligent and observant, they might notice that favors granted to others might lead to favors received in return. Thus, over time, charitable acts would be repeated more often and the habit of charity would eventually be inherited and passed on to the next generation. Second, and more important, the praise and blame of the community might encourage good behavior even more effectively than the exchange of favors. When members of the tribe praised one another for generous deeds and criticized one another for selfish ones, they could be sure that good behavior would follow all around.

Ultimately a highly complex sentiment, having its first origin in the social instincts, largely guided by the approbation of our fellow-men, ruled by reason, self-interest, and in later times by deep religious feelings, confirmed by instruction and habit, all combined, constitute our moral sense or conscience. (*Descent* 165–66)

So far, so good, but the consequences of moral improvement were not universally beneficent. “When civilised nations come into contact with barbarians the struggle is short, except where a deadly climate gives its aid to the native

race" (*Descent* 238). The inferior moral customs of tribal people put them at a disadvantage; furthermore, they frequently succumb to disease. Europeans, who once feared barbarians, now have little to worry about, for the advances of European civilization protect them. In *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin had emphasized that the struggle for existence was not so much a struggle against the environment as a struggle among members of the same species to extract a living from that environment. However, he did not stop there. In his discussion of extinction, he made clear that an equivalent struggle also took place among varieties and species. Competition with rivals, not climatic extremes, was the principal threat (74–79, 109–26). By that logic, the struggle between tribes and races brings on human extinction, with the weak and backward giving way to the strong and modern (*Descent* 236–40).

Darwin had witnessed the war of extermination carried out in Argentina against the native Indians, and he found it appalling (*Voyage* 95–100). At the same time, he tended to view such atrocities passively, regarding them as natural phenomena. His own theorizing distorted his response. When his moral optimism collided with his theoretical insights, it was the optimism that gave way (Brantlinger 164–70; Desmond and Moore 146, 149–51, 318). The result was an odd contradiction. Darwin thought human moral progress would generate respect for people of all races. His family was devoted to the abolitionist cause, his evolutionary books contained hostile remarks about slavery and he sided with the North in the American Civil War (Desmond and Moore). Nevertheless, he seemed quite resigned to the idea that many racial groups might die out or, worse yet, be exterminated by European settlement. In his theoretical scheme, Europeans behaved ruthlessly, not despite their modernity but because of it. Their moral awareness made them powerful—and they sometimes used their power for immoral ends.

Darwin's attempt to explain human morality drew him into an unpleasant tangle of paradox and self-contradiction. He had steered clear of the topic in *On the Origin of Species* simply by avoiding the subject of human beings altogether, but his critics would not allow him to duck the question. Unfortunately, the solution he offered in *The Descent of Man* created as many problems as it solved. By retaining Lyell's concept of a struggle for existence that proceeded at the level of races and species, he found himself making comparisons between more advanced and less advanced peoples, comparisons that echoed common Victorian attitudes about progress, technology and modernity. Worst of all, he undercut his own strong belief in the essential unity of man by conceding that

some men had fallen so far behind in the march to modernity that they could not be rescued. Their fate was sealed, and the grim angel of natural selection would sweep them away. It was, sadly, a conclusion not so different from that of his opponent Argyll.

Scientists who disliked Darwin's theory usually pointed to Robert Malthus as a negative moral influence on Darwin's thinking. After all, Malthus's theory of population offered an explanation for overpopulation that led both Darwin and Wallace to belief in a constant state of natural struggle among organisms. Both men gave Malthus credit for this contribution, yet we need to be careful about how Darwin, in particular, made use of Malthus's idea. Darwin thought overpopulation created competition among members of the same species, leading to gradual change as useful modifications took place and unmodified forms disappeared. However, he also thought competition took place among similar varieties and species, leading eventually to extinction for one form or another. Extinction was the result, not simply of overpopulation but of progress, the emergence of new and improved forms. This linkage between progress and extinction was the truly raw element in Darwin's thinking; and it was this element that made him a bad influence on imperialists abroad. For the modern to come about, the primitive often had to fade away.

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The Slave Auction

The Slave Auction was sculpted in 1859 by John Rogers, who was born in Salem, Massachusetts. The sculpture depicts an African-American man and an African-American woman with her children being auctioned off as property to potential owners. The woman seems to be desperately holding on to her children for fear that they might become separated, which was common in the selling of slaves.



Courtesy of the New York Historical Society

Flesh of John Brown's Flesh:

2 December 1859

BY GEOFFREY BROCK

We knew the rules and punishments
three lashes for lack of diligence,
eight for disobeying mother

or telling lies. . . . *No blood*, he'd say,
and no remission. Came a day
he started keeping my account,

as at a store. And came another
he called me to the tannery:
a Sunday, day of settlement.

I'd paid one-third the owed amount
when he, to my astonishment,
handed the blue-beech switch to me.

Always, the greatest of my fears
were not his whippings, but his tears,
and he was tearful now. I dared

not disobey, nor strike him hard.
"I will consider a weak blow
no blow at all, rather a show

of cowardice," he said. *No blood*
and no remission. Thus he paid
himself the balance that I owed,

our mingled blood a token of
a thing that went unnamed: his love.
This nation, too, is his bad child,

fails him utterly, drives him wild
with rage and grief and will be scourged
nearly to death before she, purged,

may rise and stand. *No blood*, I hear
him saying still, *and no remission*.
So hang him today, Virginia; cheer

his body swaying in the air—
tomorrow you will learn what's true:
hanging's a thing he's done for you.

"Flesh of John Brown's Flesh: 2 December 1859" by Geoffrey Brock first published in *Subtropics* (spring/summer 2006). Copyright © 2006 by the author. Used by permission.

Left with Lincoln:

The Lessons of John Brown and the Civil War for Barack Obama and the 21st Century

BY MARK D. MILLER

Our subject is Modernity and whether or not it is sustainable, which I take to mean whether or not it is relevant and viable in the 21st century. Our year is 1859. In the final months of that year, radical antislavery activist John Brown was tried, convicted and hanged by the Commonwealth of Virginia for a variety of crimes committed in his seizure of the Federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Seizure of the arsenal was part of Brown's plan to lead a slave insurrection centered in the Appalachian Mountains. Two years earlier, Brown had directed the cold-blooded murder of five proslavery men at Pottawatomie Creek in "Bleeding Kansas" and had won fame in the North by resisting a superior force of "Border Ruffians" at Osawatomie, Kansas, becoming known as "Osawatomie Brown." Yet it was through the events at Harpers Ferry that Brown entered history and legend. These events helped galvanize and polarize public opinion, North and South, and so also helped bring about secession and eventual civil war after the election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency less than a year after the hanging of Brown. Thus, in reconsidering Brown on the sesquicentennial of his martyrdom, we should probably have occasion to reconsider Lincoln as well.

However, as fate, chance or Providence would have it, the sesquicentennial of Brown's death is also the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth, and so the whole country is engaged in a yearlong celebration and reconsideration of its 16th president. Moreover, in January of this year, we inaugurated as our 44th president another tall, lanky son of Illinois, Barack Obama, our first African-American president. From the announcement of his candidacy on the steps of the old statehouse in Springfield, Illinois, to his taking the oath of office with his hand on the same Bible used by Abraham Lincoln, to his forming of a cabinet along the Lincolnesque lines described by Doris Kearns Goodwin in her book *Team of Rivals*, Barack Obama has very self-consciously and explicitly associated himself with Lincoln. In these symbolic gestures, as well as in his book *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama has also announced himself to be, like Lincoln—and unlike John Brown—a philosophical and political pragmatist. This raises the question: Is a Lincolnesque pragmatism adequate to the stormy present? If so, then at least this aspect of the Modern era will prove to be sustainable in the 21st century. "Of the Modern era," but not necessarily of Modernity, for in many ways, pragmatism is more classical or, in America, neoclassical in temper than Modern. On the other hand, perhaps the Modern era began in 1776.

American pragmatism was first articulated in a series of papers published in the 1870s by Charles Sanders Peirce, who graduated from Harvard College during our focus year, 1859. However, as William James notes in *Pragmatism*, Peirce's pragmatic maxim, which James calls "the principle of Peirce, the principle of pragmatism . . . , lay entirely unnoticed by anyone for twenty years" (29), until James himself began using and popularizing the term in 1898. The third person most readily associated with pragmatism, John Dewey, was born in that *annus mirabilis*, 1859, and lived until 1952. Thus, pragmatism is essentially a turn-of-the-century philosophy that achieved its greatest currency in the early 20th century.

However, James called it, in the subtitle to *Pragmatism*, "A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking," to which we might add, "Some Old Ways of Feeling, Believing and Acting." Indeed, James seems most accurate not in calling pragmatism a "method" or a "theory of truth" but, rather, "an attitude of orientation" (32), a "temperament" (11, 31). It is a stance toward life and a guide in the conduct of life. This becomes clear as we look closely at the pragmatic maxim, the basis of pragmatism.

Peirce's original statement of the maxim is characteristically cumbersome and obscure: "Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our concep-

tion of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object" (258). James's paraphrase, pared down a bit, is as follows: "To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, . . . we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve. . . . Our conception of these effects . . . is then for us the whole of our conception of the object . . ." (29). Rather than the phrase "effects of a practical kind," James elsewhere uses the more economical phrase "practical consequences" (28), so that the whole of our conception of an object may be said to be our conception of the conceivable practical consequences of that object. That is, our conception of the conceivable practical consequences of an object is the truth of that object, for us.

The word *practical* is crucial here, in part because it is the source of much misunderstanding and distortion of pragmatism. Giving a "history of the idea" in the book that bears its name, James first observes that the word *pragmatism* is "derived from the same Greek word . . ., meaning action, from which our words 'practice' and 'practical' come." He then cites Peirce's first use of the word in 1878, explaining that "Mr. Peirce, after pointing out that our beliefs are really rules for action, said that to develop [sic] a thought's meaning, we need only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce: that conduct is for us its sole significance" (28–29). Pragmatism thus focuses on the cutting edge of action as being that place where meaning resides, where significance emerges. Practical consequences are actions.

But "practical consequences" may also be taken to mean the consequences of our actions, the new circumstances arising from the actions we take. Moreover, as James observes, there is a constant influx of "*novelties in the world*" (60), consisting not only of the consequences of our actions but also of natural phenomena, some of which may themselves be the consequences of our actions—such as the birth every day of new actors or, on a grand, cumulative scale, global climate change—but some of which are quite out of our control. As circumstances change, we have new bases for action—new objects of thought—in an ever-unfolding or ever-evolving interplay of conception and action, conception and action. Indeed, that which today is adjudged to be, on the whole, a good new thing—the internal combustion engine, for instance—may tomorrow be adjudged to be, on the whole, a bad old thing, best reduced in its effects, if not entirely eliminated. As Abraham Lincoln famously put it near the end of his "Annual Message to Congress" in 1862, "As our case is new, so must we think anew, and act anew" (269).

Just as crucial as the word *practical*, however, is the word that modifies

it in the pragmatic maxim, *conceivable*: The truth of an object of thought is its *conceivable* practical consequences. The word points to our tragic human limitations and so indicates an important aspect of pragmatism as an attitude of orientation. For a variety of reasons, we can rarely see—or conceive of—all the practical consequences of an event or action. They are inconceivable to us. Before the Civil War, for instance, two experienced military men, one Northern and one Southern, tried to tell their countrymen that they had no idea what they were getting themselves into and urged them to continue seeking solutions short of war. As Shelby Foote points out in an interview in *The Civil War*, William Tecumseh Sherman was “actually judged to be insane for making predictions about casualties which were actually low” (265). Sam Houston encountered similar incredulity. People simply couldn’t conceive of loss on that scale.

Plurality and complexity also impede conceivability. Even a single conception usually has multiple practical consequences—several possible courses of action—each of which may, in turn, have multiple unforeseeable effects. Moreover, we generally entertain, at any one time, not a single conception but a whole host of conceptions, each with its own set of conceivable practical consequences, and where these consequences conflict, so, too, do the conceptions. Thus, we can easily make the pragmatic maxim plural, as James in fact does when he indicates that our “conception” of an object may consist of multiple “thoughts.” Indeed, given the dynamism and plurality of our conceptions and of their conceivable practical consequences, truth itself must also be a dynamic and pluralistic thing. If so, is it even accurate to speak of *the* truth? And if it is, how do we come to *know* this truth?

Perhaps we can answer the former question by first answering the latter. According to Peirce, “Experience is our only teacher. . . . [T]hat which experience does is gradually, and by a sort of fractionation, to precipitate and filter off the false ideas, eliminating them and letting the truth pour on in its mighty current” (37). There is a catch, however—a tragic, ironic catch: The “fractionation” may happen suddenly and literally to the individual undergoing the experience, and the cost of such experience may be death. Again, the Civil War provides a fitting example of this costly shock of recognition. In “The March into Virginia,” a poem about the battle of First Manassas included in his 1866 volume, *Battle-Pieces*, Herman Melville describes the “ignorant impulse” of those literal and figurative “boys” who, spurning “precedent / And warnings of the wise,” such as Sherman and Houston, march into the battle “in Bacchic glee.” Melville ends the poem:

But some who this blithe mood present,
 As on in lightsome files they fare,
 Shall die experienced ere three days are spent—
 Perish, enlightened by the vollied glare;
 Or shame survive, and, like to adamant,
 The throe of Second Manassas share.

(96–97)

Those who survive the carnage of First Manassas as well as the mortal “shame” of the ignominious retreat are strengthened by experience to endure further experience, as tempering fires strengthen adamant steel. For the others, the truth “Of battle’s unknown mysteries” (96) may have been learned, but the enlightenment coincided with their deaths, either literal or figurative. In the case of literal death, no further experience that we know of will ensue. (If it does, then life is, indeed, a “vale of soul-making,” as John Keats describes it, and the costly lesson is not entirely lost after all.) In the case of figurative death, the lesson has been so shattering that the pupil may be unfit for further learning from the Great Teacher, experience. This would be a kind of living death. Of course, it is not only war that thus traumatizes people.

The cost of experience, particularly an experience such as the American Civil War, gives us another reason the pragmatic maxim emphasizes *conceivable* practical consequences. Is it really necessary to experience a thing to know the *truth* of it? Shouldn’t we be able to extrapolate from other experiences—from “precedent,” to use Melville’s word—to decide whether or not a given conception is a good idea? Couldn’t we engage in an *imaginative* enactment of it to discover an idea’s “truth value,” to use a Jamesian phrase? Take the concept of all-out nuclear war, for instance. Perhaps the only practical consequence of that concept we need actually to experience is the act of *not* engaging in it. This example highlights an aspect of pragmatism that we would now call existential: Even inaction is a kind of action—a practical consequence—and it may be that, in a given instance, such inaction is the best course of conduct.

Our apparent inability to learn from the past, to learn the lessons of history, is not the only challenge to the authority of experience as a teacher. From a variety of impulses, human beings seem to have an almost limitless capacity to hold on to misconceptions, despite all the harsh lessons of experience and all the harsh judgments of our fellow human beings to the contrary. In his essay “The Fixation of Belief,” Peirce calls this “the method of tenacity” (235). One of the most terrifying images of this tendency and its consequences is Sophocles’s

Oedipus Rex. Even at the end of that play, after all he has endured and forced others to endure, Oedipus remains blind to the truth of his impious and prideful attitude toward life, an attitude summed up in the Greek word *hubris*. The pragmatic attitude is summed up in Oedipus's foil in the play, Creon, who displays virtues arising from that very different orientation: reason, circumspection, humility, empathy and temperance. The play reminds us that pragmatism is, indeed, a new name for some very old ways of thinking, believing, feeling and acting. It also suggests that the coercive nature of experience has the force of ultimate reality—what the Greeks called Fate and what others call God—even though we may try to ignore, resist or evade it, and even though, as free agents whose actions have real consequences in the world, we to some degree make our own reality. Lincoln liked to describe this force using lines from Shakespeare: “There’s a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will.”

Experience—reality—is coercive, but it is not fixed. It changes. Consequently, truth also changes, for truth is a relation between us and reality. As William James says, “Truth is *made*, just as health, wealth and strength are made, in the course of experience” (104). Here is how he sums up the activity:

In the realm of truth-processes facts come independently and determine our beliefs provisionally. But these beliefs make us act, and as fast as they do so, they bring into sight or into existence new facts which re-determine the beliefs accordingly. So the whole coil and ball of truth, as it rolls up, is the product of a double influence. Truths emerge from facts; but they dip forward into facts again and add to them; which facts again create or reveal new truth (the word is indifferent) and so on indefinitely. The “facts” themselves meanwhile are not *true*. They simply *are*. Truth is the function of the beliefs that start and terminate among them. (108)

This summary of the “*ver-i-fi-ca-tion*” and “*valid-a-tion*” process, as James would call it (97), reveals much about pragmatism as an attitude of orientation. According to James, the pragmatist

turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action, and towards power. That means the empiricist temper regnant, and the rationalist temper

sincerely given up. It means the open air and possibilities of nature, as against dogma, artificiality and the pretence of finality in truth.
(31)

That Abraham Lincoln was a pragmatist before the new name for that old attitude of orientation had been coined has been noted repeatedly in the years since the name gained currency. In his book *The Legacy of the Civil War*, for example, Robert Penn Warren observes that "More than one historian has found in Lincoln the model of the pragmatic mind," and he then proceeds to quote two such historians and a philosopher by way of support. The philosopher is the "modern pragmatist" Sidney Hook, who, Warren explains, "finds the core" of Lincoln's philosophy in his "whole course of action, even more fully than in his words." According to Hook, "To be principled without being fanatical, and flexible without being opportunistic, summarizes the logic and ethics of pragmatism in action" (17–18). "Fanatical" is one of the words most often applied to John Brown, one of Lincoln's foils in the tragedy of the years leading up to the American Civil War.

However, with his focus—quite literally—on the cutting edge of action, Brown also stands as a possible rebuke to pragmatism. Brown was an absolutist who considered himself "an instrument in the hands of Providence." As Merrill D. Peterson points out in *John Brown: "The Legend Revisited,"* he was so devoted to his mission of eradicating slavery from the land that he "steadily lost confidence in abolitionists who were unprepared to act. 'These men are all talk,' he said of them. 'What is needed is action—action!'" (3, 7). From a pragmatic point of view, if talk is conception merely (which it is not, as we shall see), then talk without action is meaningless. Brown simply felt that no further talk was necessary. The idea—the ideal—was absolutely clear.

In *The Audacity of Hope*, Barack Obama observes that "the framework of our Constitution" is designed to "organize the way by which we argue about our future" and "to force us into a conversation, a 'deliberative democracy' in which all citizens are required to engage in a process of testing their ideas against an external reality, persuading others of their point of view, and building shifting alliances of consent." However, in the case of slavery, Obama says, "[D]eliberation alone could not provide the slave his freedom or cleanse America of its original sin," and "It was the wild-eyed prophecies of John Brown, his willingness to spill blood and not just words on behalf of his visions, that helped force the issue of a nation half slave and half free" (92, 96–97). According to Obama, the

conduct of Brown and of “absolutists” like him reminds us “that deliberation and the Constitutional order may sometimes be the luxury of the powerful,” and “The blood of slaves reminds us that our pragmatism can sometimes be moral cowardice” (97–98).

Slavery was “the one subject the Founders refused to talk about,” Obama says. Westward expansion forced a resumption of the conversation, but the people whose fate was being decided never had a direct voice in that conversation, and well before the war, there were, among people who did have a voice, plenty who felt that further deliberation was useless. According to Robert Penn Warren, in the South, “After the debates in the Virginia legislature in 1831, when, from a variety of motives, the question of slavery was subjected to a searching scrutiny, public discussion was at an end” and “the possibility of criticism—criticism from the inside—was over” (35). In the North, Warren argues, an ethic of “personal absolutism” (32) that ultimately denied “the very concept of society” and “repudiated all . . . institutions” in favor of “the higher law” (26–27) ensured that both public discussion and criticism from the inside were at an end there, too. That is, “. . . in the North the critic . . . had repudiated society[;] in the South society repudiated the critic; and the stage was set for trouble” (36). What Warren calls “the arbitrament of reason” gave way to “the arbitrament of blood” (20). When the two sides clashed in “Bleeding Kansas,” it was not by force of reason each hoped to win the day; it was by force of arms.

Of course, on their side, the antislavery activists also had the force of *right*. However, right did not necessarily justify their actions. That is, their end did not necessarily justify their means. Lincoln made this clear in his remarks on Brown after his execution:

Old John Brown has been executed for treason against a State. We cannot object, even though he agreed with us in thinking slavery wrong. That cannot excuse violence, bloodshed, and treason. It could avail him nothing that he might think himself right. (qtd. in *Legacy* 23–24)

But simply because they agreed that slavery was wrong does not mean that Brown and Lincoln had the same object in mind when they conceived of its abolition. In the first place, Lincoln held—at least initially—a conception and a conviction that superseded the abolition of slavery, and that was the preservation of the Union. As a “higher law” man, Brown had no such competing

conception. Indeed, for Brown, any compromise with the slaveholding states aimed at preserving the Union—even if that compromise included *containing* slavery so that it could be abolished gradually and eventually—was treason against the kingdom of God, as it were, and he therefore hated it and was bound to oppose it.

Moreover, it is unclear whether Lincoln ever conceived of a nation where blacks and whites could live together as equals. Certainly in the infamous “Address on Colonization to a Committee of Colored Men” in 1862, he did not seem to think it was possible, telling his guests, “[E]ven when you cease to be slaves, you are yet far removed from being placed on an equality with the white race. . . . It is better for us both, therefore, to be separated” (235–36). Brown’s vision was quite different. As Peterson puts it, “Brown’s empathy with blacks was the most remarkable feature of his character. He truly believed that black people were the equals of whites, and he conducted himself accordingly” (3).

This difference of means and ends continued to characterize those engaged in the struggle for African-American rights long after the abolition of slavery. During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, for instance, many militants, such as Malcolm X at his most radical, rejected the notion of integration and so were in some ways more closely aligned with Lincoln than with Brown, and yet they embraced Brown’s militant tactics. More moderate activists—most notably Martin Luther King, Jr.—rejected Brown’s tactics but embraced his vision of a community of equals. It can be argued that King’s belief in nonviolence was at least as powerful as his belief in justice and equality, if not more so, just as Lincoln’s belief in Union initially took precedence over his hatred of slavery. Of course, a cynic might also point out that the promotion of Union or the promotion of nonviolence was *expedient* in either case, and that is true, but in neither case does the belief seem to have been *merely* expedient.

Significantly, King’s *nonviolent* course of action has the same origin as Brown’s *violent* course of action—his religious faith—and this must give us pause. In the context of antislavery agitation—in addition to John Brown, he also mentions William Lloyd Garrison, Denmark Vesey, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman—this aspect of our history certainly gives Barack Obama pause. It reminds him, he says,

that it has sometimes been the cranks, the zealots, the prophets, the agitators, and the unreasonable—in other words, the absolutists—that have fought for a new order. Knowing this, I can’t summarily dismiss those possessed of similar certainty today—the antiabortion

activist who pickets my town hall meeting, or the animal rights activist who raids a laboratory—no matter how deeply I disagree with their views. I am robbed even of the certainty of uncertainty—for sometimes absolute truths may well be absolute. (97)

Dr. King's strategy clearly demonstrates that fervent religious belief does not necessarily result in violent practical consequences, that one doesn't *have* to be militant to be revolutionary. Indeed, in a crazy society, perhaps one can be revolutionary simply by sitting at a lunch counter or on a seat in the front rather than the back of the bus.

Moreover, the career of John Brown himself demonstrates that the power of the word should not be underestimated. As we have seen, Brown tended to scorn mere talk, preferring action. However, once he had the stage, after the failure of the Harpers Ferry raid, it was in large part Brown himself who, through a series of memorable statements as well as gestures, created his own enduring status as a symbol and a myth. And then there was that song, "John Brown's Body." By the time Julia Ward Howe transformed it into "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," the third-person masculine pronoun—as in the line "His truth is marching on"—referred in the minds of many both to John Brown and to God.

Frederick Douglass, who declined to join Brown and his men at Harpers Ferry, berated himself thereafter, in Hamletesque fashion, as being a man of words, words, words. Yet his autobiography and his many speeches—including one on Brown—were also powerful galvanizing forces, before, during and after the war. There is also the example of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, whose author, Harriet Beecher Stowe, was said to have been greeted by Lincoln at the White House with "So this is the little lady who made this big war." The purported greeting is an exaggeration, of course, but the powerful reaction to her novel is ample evidence of what the pragmatists, taking their cue from Emerson (another champion of Brown) and well before speech-act theory existed, knew to be the case: that speech is a kind of action, and action a kind of speech; that talk is *not* always just conception but can itself be action. Of course, the Greeks knew this, too, and so did Lincoln, as he vividly demonstrated in speech after speech and especially in the Gettysburg Address. At any rate, as these various examples show, many religious or just principled, legal, extralegal and even illegal forms of agitation, short of violence, murder or treason, can be undertaken. John Brown himself was active for many years in the Underground Railroad, before he turned to more extreme tactics.

But even though it has not, as President Obama says, “always been the pragmatist, the voice of reason, or the force of compromise, that has created the conditions for liberty” (97), he himself is not prepared to abandon pragmatism. “I’m left then with Lincoln,” he concludes, and to the degree that pragmatism is an accurate reading of the human condition, and unless we want to continue paying what Obama calls “the terrible price” of pursuing absolutistic agendas (98), we are *all* left with Lincoln. According to Obama, Lincoln was a man “who like no man before or since understood the deliberative function of our democracy and the limits of such deliberation” (97)—or, in pragmatic terms (and using one of William James’s favorite words), the *strenuous* interplay of conception and action and the consequences for life that interplay involves. Obama here concurs with those historians who see a connection between Lincoln’s pragmatism and his tragic sense, historians such as David Donald, who describes Lincoln’s pragmatism as “an expression of his tragic realization of the limitations on human activity” (142). According to Obama, Lincoln sought and attempted to maintain within himself “the balance between two contradictory ideas—that we must talk and reach for common understandings, precisely because all of us are imperfect and can never act with the certainty that God is on our side; and yet at times we must act nonetheless, as if we are certain, protected from error only by providence” (98).

The situation Obama describes here recalls a crux in *Oedipus Rex*. Oedipus has blindly turned upon Creon, his trusted advisor, accusing him of treason, and despite Creon’s reasoned self-defense, Oedipus persists in his error. Creon asks, “But suppose that you are wrong?” and Oedipus replies, “Still, I must rule” (821). Given the complexity of experience and the limits of our vision, each of us is bound to be wrong sooner or later; and while we may not be rulers, still, we must act, particularly since, as we have seen, even inaction is a kind of action. Thus, where human beings are concerned, error is in the cards, even when we are *not* blinded by *hubris*, as Oedipus is.

Of course, assuming the inevitable error doesn’t kill us—and in the complication of things, a right action can sometimes be just as deadly as a wrong one—the resulting state of things will give us a new object of contemplation and deliberation and, thus, a new basis for action. Although we will rarely conceive of *all* of the conceivable practical consequences in any given instance, we will have to act anyway; but if we have learned what experience has to teach us, then we will act as Obama says Lincoln did: with “self-awareness” and “humility” (98). It was this self-awareness and humility, according to Obama, that “led Lincoln

to advance his principles through the framework of our democracy, through speeches and debate, through the reasoned arguments that might appeal to the better angels of our nature. It was this same humility," Obama adds, "that allowed him, once the conversation between North and South broke down and war became inevitable, to resist the temptation to demonize the fathers and sons who did battle on the other side, or to diminish the horror of war, no matter how just it might be" (98). As we have seen, however, it was apparently Lincoln's lack of empathy—which is an aspect of humility and self-awareness—and not just his love of the Union that prevented him from being able to conceive of a nation in which blacks and whites could live together as equals and that also led him to propose colonization. That is, he does not seem—at least initially—to have been able to extend to blacks the empathy he felt for white Southerners. In this, John Brown exceeds him and is a rebuke to him, as well as to the pragmatism that, in this instance—and for whatever variety of reasons—failed.

However, there is considerable evidence that, under the tutelage of the Great Teacher, experience, Lincoln was even coming around on the question of equality. It has been argued by some historians that, on the issue of race, Lincoln's private feelings did not square with his public policies and pronouncements, that he was personally not prejudiced but that, as president, he had to be tough-minded about the prejudice prevailing in the country. Other historians—and this is probably the dominant view now—have argued that Lincoln changed and grew on the issue of racial equality, swayed by such experiences as his friendship with Douglass and the extraordinary bravery of African-American regiments during the war. To borrow a phrase from Barack Obama, Lincoln was making up for his "empathy deficit" (67) by growing and changing during the last years of his life. "To see Lincoln in this light," as Richard N. Current wrote in 1958, "is to make him more than ever relevant . . . as a symbol of man's ability to outgrow his prejudices . . ." (236)—a very pragmatic ability. This is the Lincoln who emerges from one of the most recent examinations of the myth and the man, *Looking for Lincoln*, by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.¹

¹In *The Audacity of Hope*, Barack Obama seems to regard empathy as both a means and an end, arguing that, through empathy, "We are all forced beyond our limited vision" (68), and declaring, "[A] sense of empathy . . . is at the heart of my moral code" and is "a guidepost for my politics" (66–67).

On Friday, May 1, 2009, President Obama interrupted White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs during a press briefing to announce that Justice David Souter would be retiring from the Supreme Court. After praising Souter as someone who "rejected absolutes," President Obama began to describe what he would be looking for in a Supreme Court nominee, saying that empathy was "essential." This seemingly innocuous remark touched off a raucous reaction in the press. As usual, one of the

Whatever the case in the end, though, Lincoln was not, from the beginning, a clear and vocal proponent of racial equality, as was Brown. Indeed, he was even slow to strike against slavery, searching first for answers within the framework of the Constitution and short of disunion and war, and then, once war had begun, being reluctant to declare a sweeping emancipation. Do we therefore revile Lincoln as a tainted hero and reject pragmatism as hopelessly compromised? Do we abandon the framework of the Constitution and embrace absolutism as the better, because purer, solution?

To do so would be to lose our own humility and self-awareness. We have to be willing to extend our own empathy to Lincoln, even though he seems initially to have been unable to extend his empathy fully not only to the enslaved African-Americans he would emancipate but also to those African-Americans who already had their freedom. Near the end of *Looking for Lincoln*, Gates assumes the role of the person—in particular the African-American person—who has learned the complicated truth behind the idealized myth of Abraham Lincoln and is bitterly disillusioned. Doris Kearns Goodwin implores him to have empathy for Lincoln in order to understand and accept the man, as opposed to the myth. The myth is an absolute, but so, too, is utter condemnation of the man because of his human limitations. We are left with Lincoln and with pragmatism because, otherwise, we may be left with only a particularly vicious tyranny, a tyranny our pragmatic Constitution is meant to keep in check: the tyranny of absolutism.

As the career of John Brown shows, absolutism can be ugly and brutal even in the name of right, even when we are tempted to try to separate the end from the means because we perceive the end to be good but the means bad. We want to separate the Pottawatomie Massacre as well as the debacle at Harpers Ferry from the good end they were meant to bring about. However, they are finally, in Brown, inseparable from that end—as inseparable as Lincoln's apparent racism from all the good that *he* brought about. They are the practical consequences of a conception of things in which error is inconceivable, a hubristic conception of things.

If absolutism in the name of right can be ugly and brutal, what of absolut-

more trenchant analyses of the phenomenon came from Jon Stewart on the episode of *The Daily Show* airing the following Monday, May 4, 2009: "Actually, you know what I love? Those who explain that 'empathy' is a code word for 'activist judge,' which is a code word for 'pro-choice.' They're helping us break the code with more code!" (*Daily*). This brouhaha may tell us something about the odds against pragmatism in the current political climate. Pragmatism and empathy faced even longer odds in Lincoln's time.

ism in the name of something we judge to be wrong? Present at the martyrdom of both John Brown and Abraham Lincoln was an actor—literally an actor—who hated both men and everything they stood for. He was glad to witness the taking of John Brown's life, and he would himself take the life of Abraham Lincoln. His name was John Wilkes Booth. Booth was no less certain than Brown of the rightness of both his means and his ends, of both his actions and the conception of things that prompted them. Such absolutism may be easier to condemn, but that does not make it any easier to deal with.

Moreover, in the 21st century, both kinds of absolutism go marching on, just as they did before the American Civil War. Early in the year 2000, the bicentennial of John Brown's birth, a documentary film titled *John Brown's Holy War* aired on PBS as part of the series called *The American Experience*. A little over six months later, on September 11, 2001, the world would watch in horror as a 21st-century, international holy war came to American soil. Among other things, this event demonstrates that, for Barack Obama, the house divided is not just the United States of America but the world. However, it also clearly shows that absolutism is alive and well in the 21st century. John Brown was often described as a throwback, a Cromwellian Puritan who appeared anachronistic in the 19th century. Many in the 19th century felt that the chattel slavery Brown opposed was also outmoded—though Brown himself would argue that it had *never* been right—yet John Wilkes Booth and many like him fervently supported it. Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda and the Taliban are also often described as outmoded, anachronistic throwbacks, and yet here they are, in the 21st century. Nor do they have a corner, in the 21st century, on policies and practices that most of us consider also to be throwback—and wrong: the oppression of women, for instance. Thus, we have not progressed beyond absolutism in our own time, and it may be that in our own time, the precedents of Lincoln and pragmatism remain our best hope.

We are left with Lincoln precisely because we were *not* left with Lincoln, because it is easy to call John Wilkes Booth a villain and hard to call John Brown a hero, and because without Lincoln and pragmatism, we are potentially left with only the tyranny of absolutism, and with anarchy. As Robert Penn Warren says of the latter in *The Legacy of the Civil War*,

[T]he conviction, proclaimed by Wendell Phillips, that "one with God is always a majority," does not lend encouragement to the ordinary democratic process. With every man his own majority as well as his

own law, there is, in the logical end, only anarchy, and anarchy of a peculiarly tedious and bloodthirsty sort, for every drop is to be spilled in God's name and by his explicit directive. (33)

Over against this absolutist ethic, Warren says, is "an ethic that demands scrutiny of motive, context, and consequences, particularly the consequences to others. This kind of ethic, laborious, fumbling, running the risk of degenerating into expediency, finds its apotheosis in Lincoln . . ." (32).

When this ethic—the ethic of pragmatism—does degenerate into expediency, or when it is confused by competing aims, or when it is marred by a lack of imagination—particularly the empathetic imagination—so that it fails to conceive of all that is conceivable, it can lead to such ugly consequences as Lincoln's suspension of the writ of habeas corpus during the war; or his attempts, before the war, to compromise with the South and, hence, with slavery, in an effort to avoid war and preserve the Union; or his proposal to colonize African-Americans somewhere outside the United States. This is, as Obama says, "a practicality that would distress us today" (97), which is perhaps why one of Obama's first acts as president was to order closure of the prison for accused terrorists at Guantánamo Bay. His argument was that the existence of "Gitmo" undermined the very values for which America supposedly stands, much as Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus did, according to his critics, and much as certain provisions of the Patriot Act continue to do today, according to critics of that act. On the other hand, the closing of "Gitmo" may have the practical consequence not only of helping us get right with ourselves but also of helping us get right with the rest of the world. Nevertheless, some have found the *impracticality* of this and of other Obama initiatives distressing. Such is the rough and tumble of politics. As Obama himself has candidly acknowledged, if his actions fail—particularly his measures to solve the economic crisis that has all but taken over the early part of his administration—then he will be voted out of office after four years.

Barack Obama sums up his acceptance and approval of our pragmatic way of doing things in this way:

The rejection of absolutism in our Constitutional structure may sometimes make our politics seem unprincipled. But for most of our history it has encouraged the very process of information gathering, analysis, and argument that allows us to make better, if not perfect, choices, not only about the means to our ends but also about the

ends themselves. Whether we are for or against affirmative action, for or against prayer in schools, we must test out our ideals, vision, and values against the realities of a common life, so that over time they may be refined, discarded, or replaced by new ideals, sharper visions, deeper values. (94–95)

Obama's bet is that this pragmatic approach to politics will continue to serve us well throughout the 21st century and beyond. In electing him president, we have made this our bet, too.

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Humanity: How D'yuh Spell It?

Keynote Address to the Council of Public Liberal Arts
Colleges at the University of North Carolina at Asheville
June 5, 2009

BY ROY CARROLL

Thank you for the introduction, Bill. Introductions are important. They are our way of trying to make common contact. To get to know one another, we're usually asked to give our names. Then we're asked, "What do you do?"—as though we can establish who we are by our names and by what we do.

In Eugene O'Neill's play *The Great God Brown*, a police captain bends over the lifeless body of William A. Brown and asks, "Well, what's his name?" Someone replies, "Man," and the captain says, "How d'yuh spell it?" (2: Act IV)

To be politically correct, O'Neill would now say that human or humanity is the name we need to know how to spell. Human? That's me. Humanity? That's us. But what does that mean? How do we spell it?

Each of you represents a public liberal-arts college where the focus is on

liberal education, on knowledge that enlarges our understanding and deepens our insight regarding both ourselves and others.

Thomas Wolfe defines that kind of knowledge as “a potent and subtle distillation of experience”—not just our experience but also the experience of others. The liberal education we espouse frees us from the narrow confines of self, from our own limited time and space. It introduces us to ourselves and to our common humanity. It liberates us.

The most liberating disciplines are the humanities, which, at their best, preserve and pass on the cumulative experience, knowledge and wisdom of our cultural heritage. *The humanities are the heart and core of a liberal education, and history is the heart and core of the humanities.*

Oh, I know that history and literature are closely related fields that enrich and reinforce each other. Each would be poorer without the other. But let me be clear—I have long proclaimed, unapologetically, that history is more comprehensive, more diverse, more illuminating and more important than any other subject in the curriculum. It claims all of human experience as its province. It is, in Arnold Toynbee’s words, “a search for light on the nature and destiny of man.”

History is an essential lens or mirror through which we are introduced to ourselves, our common humanity and the human condition.

It is only through a knowledge of history that our own brief lives . . . become one with the record of the human race. . . . The life of the individual breaks its barriers and becomes coterminous with humanity. Bound as our lives are to the tyranny of time, it is through what we know of history that we are delivered from our bonds and escape—into time. (Rowse 26)

Humanity: How does history spell it? How do we spell it? Sometimes we spell it strength and sometimes weakness, sometimes courage and sometimes cowardice, sometimes saint and sometimes sinner, sometimes mean and sometimes miracle. Miracle? Yes.

There is a scene in *The Lark* by Jean Anouilh and Lillian Hellman in which Joan of Arc is on trial.

Joan: I say that true miracles are not tricks performed by gypsies in a village square. True miracles are created by men when they use the courage and the intelligence that God gave them.

Cauchon: You are saying to us, to *us*, that the real miracle of God on this earth is man. Man, who is naught but sin and error, impotent against his own wickedness.

Joan: And man is also strength and courage and splendor in his most desperate moments. I know man because I have seen him. He is a miracle. (Act I)

As the heart of the liberal curriculum, history introduces us to real persons, to moral creatures who have consciences no matter how hard they may strive or pretend to stifle and ignore them. It reveals to us our great potential for good or for evil. It brings us face to face with our humanity.

History also provides an integrative context, a frame of reference for the study of other disciplines. It helps us understand and appreciate other literature. It helps us understand the events of the present. It makes things past and things present more real and more personal. Let me illustrate. Today, President Barack Obama is going to tour Buchenwald. To fully grasp the significance of the visit, one needs to know the history of Germany in the 1930s and 1940s.

We can set the scene by bringing history and poetry together. War-torn Germany, 1945. The fighting is over. The horror of the camps is beyond belief. Displaced persons of all ages are hogging the roads or haunting the rubble.

Walter Benton, a young officer in the US Army in Europe at the time, and a keen observer of the scene, wrote this powerful poem:

Who knows their names?
What was their work?
Which was a peddler . . . which a priest, a poet—
Anonymously naked in the cyanide chambers?

Who wept for them?
Who shall remember them . . . where none was left
To weep or to remember?

They died because.
Not even those who knew could understand.
Not as martyrs, exactly, or heroes . . . there was no virtue involved
or morals,
no guilt or innocence—

Their dying strengthened no earthly good, weakened no evil—
proved nothing, taught nothing . . . began or ended nothing.

On every wall of a room, in every room of a house,
in every house in Bavaria—
a humble, wounded, dying Jew-Christ on a cross.

Cast, carved, painted Jew-Christ on every wall
in Bavaria . . . in every corner,
Jew-angels,
wise bearded Jews partaking of the Last Supper,
the Jewess Mary . . . with smiling little Jew-God.

I cannot understand this.

The gas chambers of Maidanek had walls, too.
And there were hooks for life-size images
On the bloodied walls of Belsen and Dachau.
(41-42)

In another poem, Benton wrote of the beauty and devastation, the anger and desperation:

Germany, the land that is Germany, has beauty, too,
The dark, green, ancient plains . . . the hills,
high-castled Heidelberg, forests of beech and pine,
the terraced vineyards on the steep banks of the Rhine—

the Rhine of Lorelei . . . the Rhine of the Nibelungs,
swirling over scuttled barges and backbroken bridges. . .

Those returning converge futilely upon the ruins—
the old, passive and sullen . . . the children, waving or nazi-saluting.
The older boys, having put away their daggers for another day,
Sidestep the onrushing trucks leisurely, contemptuously.
Only the women . . . the young, blue-eyed women, smile—
their infinite weapon is the warm promise of love.
Our driver, a kid from Iowa, admits he would love being conquered
by one of these, pedaling their bicycles uninhibited,
generous with their full, white thighs.

Lt. Marcus says: Christ! It makes me sick, these people,
Lost, tired . . . pushing their carts nowhere— . . .

Lt. King, his face patched up with the skin off his side, says:
Marcus, did you ever go through Buchenwald?
Were you ever in Belsen or Dachau . . . have you ever heard
of Lidice or Warsaw, Stalingrad, Rotterdam, Coventry . . . or seen
starved women and men . . . and children
gassed, drowned, poisoned, clubbed—hanged on the hooks and sent
still kicking down the conveyor into white-hot ovens?

What do you think when you look at the empty sleeves
all over the world . . . the pinned-up pantlegs, the stitched
Frankenstein faces . . . like this—
The awful haunted eyes that will never know peace, even in peace?

Their carts bother you? Their lost tired look?
There never was a people since the beginning that deserved
What they got
More than these did—may the good Lord forever damn the bastards!
(47–49)

But there was more to that Germany. Nowhere is this illustrated more vividly than in the letters and diaries of Christians in Hitler's Germany, especially those who were arrested following an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Hitler on July 20, 1944.

One of those arrested was a young Jesuit priest, Alfred Delp, aged 37. His theological studies led him into the Kreisau Circle of the resistance. On July 28, 1944, he was arrested, though he was not involved in the plot, and in succeeding months was interrogated, tortured, beaten and eventually tried.

On New Year's night, with fettered hands, he wrote in his diary:

Within me there has been a great deal of vanity and self-reliance and presumption and untruthfulness during the past year. . . . And therefore very much is burned away on this mountain of lightning, and much has been purged. . . . The inner light must kindle a new passion. A passion of testimony for the living God, for I have come to know him, and I have felt his presence. . . .

After his conviction and the death sentence was pronounced, Delp wrote:

Up to now the Lord has helped me most nobly and warmly. I have not yet felt frightened, nor have I broken down. . . . Perhaps it is a grace and an assistance from God the Father, who in this way lets me pass through the desert without having to die of thirst. . . . What does the Lord want with all this? Is it education for complete freedom and utter dedication? Does he want the whole chalice, to the last drop . . . ? Or does he desire a proof of faith? . . . In any event I shall wait here honestly for the Lord's dispensation and guidance. I shall trust him until someone comes to get me. And I shall strive to arrange that even this omen and outcome will not find me small and discouraged.

They came to get him that night, February 2, 1945, and they hanged him on a slaughterhouse meat hook (Zimmerman 222–24).

Benton's poetry and Delp's prose are primary records that illumine our minds and open our understanding. These men were active participants in the scenes they have preserved for us. Their eloquence and the immediacy of their testimony enrich the history of their time. What we know of that history from other sources enables us to better appreciate and comprehend Captain Benton's poetry and Father Delp's diary.

Note: The words we have used to spell humanity have ethical significance and content. They are, in fact, value-laden.

Benton's poems and Delp's diary entries are concerned with important issues, issues such as being and nonbeing, life and death, justice and injustice, freedom and responsibility, equality and inequality, the individual and society, war and peace.

And so is history. It forces us to ask the large questions about the large issues of life. Ponder Benton's closing lines in yet another poem on war:

O will we ever know our rumored greatness
who kill as stonemen killed for one's tongue or color,
conscience or face of God,
With piety on our lips and science shining in our eyes—
Embracing logic or the cross as an adulteress her husband.
(62)

That is why history should have a more exalted place and more space in our academic programs. Not for the sake of the history department and its

faculty members—history departments are not ends in themselves—but for the sake of our students, for the sake of our society, for the sake of our common humanity. Not history for history's sake but history for our sake. A knowledge of history is necessary if we are to have better-informed and more mature leaders, and better-informed and more mature citizens.

A year or so ago, I saw a bumper sticker that puzzled and troubled me. It read:

HISTORY IS A THING OF THE PAST.

Was it an expression of concern? Was it the sounding of an alarm because universities and colleges are steadily easing history out of the requirements and out of the electives, too? I don't know, but we historians should do all we can to avoid academic, disciplinary, curricular suicide! As someone who has fought (and won) some of those battles, I urge you to keep the faith and fight the good fight. Preach and teach history to all the audiences you can find.

Humanity: How d' yuh spell it?

I spell it H-I-S-T-O-R-Y.

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The Meaning of Cuba on the 50th Anniversary of the Triumph of the Revolution

BY MAYNARD SEIDER

I still have the one picture my parents brought back with them from their honeymoon to Cuba in 1937. In the two-by-three black-and-white photo, they are young and serious, standing in front of a statue of José Martí in Havana's Central Park. Why was it so meaningful to me? At the age of nine, when I first saw the picture, I must have thought of Cuba as an exotic island, but I think my connection to it had more to do with my identification with my father and the realization that Cuba was the only foreign travel he had ever done. My father wasn't much of a talker, but when I would ask him about Havana, he would tell me about the awful poverty that he witnessed.

I learned about the Revolution as a high school student, though my teachers didn't discuss it at all, except for a negative comment or two. Somehow I knew that those bearded guys had done something good and important. As a teenager, I didn't know much about politics, and I think my approval of Fidel coincided with a spirit of rebellion and a sense that he, Elvis and the other icons of rock 'n' roll knew, even then, which way the wind was blowing.

While I was an undergraduate, my initial good feelings about J.F.K. dissipated with the Bay of Pigs invasion. Soon after, I listened to a firsthand report from two Americans who had just returned from Cuba and painted a picture of a spirited people making revolutionary gains. I learned to distrust U.S. media accounts of Fidel, Che and the Revolution, and tried to do as much reading on my own as I could. The social movements of the '60s spoke to the need for social change here at home and only underlined the value of the new society developing in the Caribbean, not that far from the tip of Florida. As a young sociology graduate student at the University of Wisconsin, I began to read C. Wright Mills, a Wisconsin alum and a model sociologist-activist for those of my generation.

Mills died young, two years before I started graduate school, but *White Collar* and *The Power Elite* were already classics, as was his devastating critique of establishment sociology, *The Sociological Imagination*. But what I also remember from those mid-'60s days was another of Mills's books, more of a pamphlet than a piece of empirical sociology. He titled it *Listen, Yankee*: "The Revolution in Cuba." In 1960, after visiting Cuba and meeting with many of its Revolutionary leaders, including Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, Mills concluded "that much of whatever you have read recently about Cuba in the U.S. press is far removed from the realities and the meaning of what is going on in Cuba today" (9). Mills died two years later, but had he survived and visited the same landscape today, he would probably reach a similar conclusion. In a recent review of U.S. press coverage, Saul Landau, a U.S. Cuban expert who helped Mills in his writing of *Listen, Yankee*, states unequivocally that since 1959, "U.S. mass media have reflected the views of the U.S. government and systematically misreported the Cuban Revolution" (49).

I've traveled to Cuba three times over the past decade and have visited that same park where my parents posed more than 70 years ago. The park and the statue look the same, but the palm trees behind Independence martyr José Martí have grown so high that they blot out the capital building that loomed so clearly in the 1937 background. After the Revolution, the Cuban government turned that building into a museum, not wanting to house its National Assembly in the place where so many Cuban governments did the bidding of the United States. Over the past half century, that struggle to define itself, to be independent of the U.S.—or, as the Cubans say, "*Patria o Muerte*"—has been a guiding theme of Cuban development. At the same time, a dominant, some might say even obsessive, hallmark of U.S. policy since 1959 has been to

overthrow the Revolution, to bring Cuba back into its sphere of influence.

How has Cuba survived, and what is its meaning today? I will try to answer those questions by reflecting on a half dozen or so written snapshots of my visit to Cuba this past winter, on the occasion of the Revolution's 50th anniversary. To satisfy the travel guidelines of the U.S. government, my wife, Sheila, and I had to describe our Cuban research agenda, provide letters from our employers to authenticate our professional background and have a notary public stamp our vital papers. Still, our government makes it virtually impossible to fly to Cuba from the U.S., so we drove nearly 500 miles to Canada to begin our journey to the Caribbean. In Toronto, we joined several dozen Canadians and a few other Americans, part of our 43-person solidarity group headed for Havana.

Day One: We spend one of our most delightful evenings in Havana in the Guanabacoa neighborhood as guests of the local Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR). We arrive in two buses to be greeted by a huge block party. Our hosts have arranged rows of chairs in the street so we can comfortably be entertained by the neighborhood children. After the CDR president formally welcomes us, we watch some 20 costumed children dance and sing for us, to be followed by a martial-arts exhibition featuring eight teenagers and older men. Then there is food and drink and dance, and even though most of us know very little Spanish, the universal language of music makes it work.



Neighborhood children greet North American visitors with song and dance at CDR party. (Photograph by Michelle Chen.)

We commission Sheila, who is still fluent in Spanish from her Peace Corps days in Chile, to offer thanks for all of us, which she does to calls of "*Viva la Revolucion!*"

CDRs bring with them some controversy, as do all manifestations of politics in Cuba. They look like organizations that set up after-school and summer programs for the children and initiate recycling campaigns. Opponents of the Revolution, and probably more than a few supporters, see them as neighborhood groups that act as political commissars, making sure that all follow the correct political line. In a recent interview, President Raul Castro admitted to human-rights violations in Cuba while stating that "No country is 100-percent free of human rights abuses" (Penn 18). It remains true that in Cuba, one is not free to publicly criticize the one-party system, enshrined in the Cuban Communist Party. While criticism is encouraged at the local, provincial and national levels of all the electoral bodies, that criticism must be offered in a way to move the socialist state forward, and not to suggest ending the socialist experiment.

Some of the most important internal debates of the past 50 years occurred during the Special Period of the 1990s, after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union. At that time, the Cubans lost 85 percent of their trade, leading to a shortage of basic food supplies along with fuel and electricity. The leadership feared that the regime might well come to an end. While opinions varied, the government ultimately decided to make changes in its monopoly control of the economy, allowing state farms to become coops, legalizing private farm markets, offering licenses for households to become bed-and-breakfasts for tourists, allowing private restaurants to open and making it possible for government tradesmen—electricians, carpenters and plumbers—to sell their skills privately. The government also sought foreign investment to build up a stronger tourist trade but insisted that Cuba maintain majority control of all foreign joint ventures.

The need for foreign exchange, vital now with the loss of the Soviet trade bloc, meant that foreign currency, even the dollar, needed to be legalized. It brought about a two-currency system in Cuba, with most Cubans holding pesos and those in the tourist trade able to amass convertible pesos, with access to a higher standard of living. It may have been fear of the development of a two-class system that kept Fidel from initially supporting the many reforms instituted in the Special Period. In a famous exchange in the National Assembly, Raul made the case for reforms, while his much more famous and charismatic brother held to a strict ideological line. Raul won the day and the support of

the Assembly when he famously stated, "Beans are more important than canons." Without change, without some reforms, the lingering food crisis could have led to riots and worse for the government.

Day Two: We drive to the outskirts of Havana past residential areas to a lush rural landscape as the road winds to the sea. There sits the decade-old Latin America School of Medicine (*Escuela Latinoamericana de Medicina*, or ELAM), with a current enrollment of more than 12,000 students in fairly modern buildings formerly occupied by Cuba's naval academy. We are ushered into a spacious room around a huge conference table. The walls of the room are covered with colorful maps and charts designating the 29 home countries of the students and their numbers. We quickly learn that, despite the school's name, students also originate from Africa, Asia and the United States.

Milades Castilla, vice principal of ELAM, an attractive woman in her early 50s, greets us warmly. She tells us that the idea for the school came from Fidel in 1998 after two huge Caribbean hurricanes led to the deaths of more than 30,000 people in Central America. Cuba immediately sent doctors and paramedics to help the survivors in those countries that lacked medical personnel and facilities. To meet the need for doctors in Central America and the rest of Latin America, Cuba began planning to operate a medical school that would enroll students from throughout the region at no charge, with free room and board and a monthly stipend. In return, the students would return to their countries of origin and tend to the medical needs of the poor for a period of at least three years. The Cubans worked quickly and the school opened in February 1999.

Although I fill my notebook with the facts and figures that Castilla presents to us, what really captures my attention, and my heart, is the enthusiasm she shows for the project and its results. Castilla displays her own gratitude for the Revolution, noting that she was born into a poor family and never thought she could become a doctor but was able to because of the free schooling provided to Cubans, from preschool through graduate and professional studies.

We learn that entering students must have a B.A. or its equivalent, be younger than 26, be healthy and without a criminal record. Before they start their formal training at ELAM, the students take an 18-week premed course. They then do their first two years of medical training at ELAM and continue the remaining two to four years at Cuban hospitals scattered throughout the island.

Our group of Canadians and Americans listen attentively to the vice principal's description of the psychological and social changes the students undergo during their matriculation at ELAM. Here they discover a solidarity that is

part of the Cuban identity. They move from simply focusing on themselves to becoming part of a wider, though still diverse, group. During their two-year stint at ELAM, they learn how to practice medicine and epidemiology and to foster links to the ELAM community—students, professors and the 1900 workers who maintain the buildings and grounds.

Castilla answers the questions posed, and there are many. Virtually every time she refers to the government, she adds, “and Fidel.” She speaks about the U.S. blockade and how it keeps valuable equipment and some medications from reaching Cuba, and often increases the cost of medical goods that the country receives. She also informs us of the ways that the blockade directly harms the people of the U.S., as valuable vaccines and medicines to cure some forms of lung and prostate cancer—medical breakthroughs that have been developed in Cuban research laboratories—are not allowed to enter the United States. I think that if Americans knew about this, their opposition to the blockade would quickly grow.

Besides their very well-known work in Venezuela, Cuban doctors help staff eight medical schools in Africa. Cuban medical training places a great emphasis on primary care, and we learn that almost half of the 73,000 doctors in Cuba practice primary care, working with nurses in neighborhoods, to maintain the right of free, high-quality care for all Cubans.

Despite the economic difficulties that Cuba, a relatively poor country, still faces, Castilla reminds us that “with political will, everything is possible.” When a sociologist from the University of Victoria asks her what the Revolution has meant to her, she takes only a few moments to consider the question, and then simply answers, “*Mi vida*” (my life).

At one point in the morning’s discussion, Sheila turns to me and whispers, “Cuba has the Latin America School of Medicine to export doctors, and we have the School of the Americas to export torture.” I feel shame more than once during our trip when I learn additional details about our government’s economic and military aggression against the people of this tropical island. Maybe that’s why we ask the other members of our group to make us, at least for the time being, “honorary Canadians,” symbolically joining a country whose relations with Cuba remain open and friendly.

That evening we walk a few blocks from our hotel to the Havana Libre, formerly the Havana Hilton, where Fidel and many of his compatriots set up headquarters after victoriously marching into the capital city on January 8, 1959. Now a major hotel in this city of more than two million people, its sign

remains a landmark and symbol in the center of Havana. We climb the stairs to a conference room on the second floor, where University of Havana sociologist Martha Nunez will speak to us on "Cuban Society Today." A veteran teacher of 42 years at the university, Nunez begins by summarizing the negative stereotypes of Cuba that the U.S. media have fostered over the past 50 years: (1) The Revolution has been a failure, despite some gains in education and health care; (2) Cuba is a dictatorship, with no concern for human rights; (3) Cuba's economy is a failure; (4) almost all Cubans want to leave; and (5) the abject economy has driven Cuban women to prostitution. In making that case, Nunez refers to a recent article by Roger Cohen, a featured cover story in *The New York Times Magazine*.

I remember reading Cohen's article, though I let the magazine lie around for a week, as the cover itself spoke to its negativity. In front of headline type spelling out "THE END OF THE END OF THE REVOLUTION" stand Fidel Castro in army fatigues, rifle, pistol and cigar, and five revolutionaries behind him. All look, at best, serious, but more accurately, forlorn, as if they come to mourn at a funeral and not march "to liberate Havana in 1959," as the inside explanation of the photograph tells us (4). The editors must have looked far and wide to find such a despairing photo of the victors. As if we haven't yet been able to determine the tenor of the article, the cover's subhead reads "Castro's Cuba Is Turning 50. It's Been Dying for Years. What Can Obama—or Anyone Else—Do to Help Bring the Island into the 21st Century?" The four photos within the article picture a Havana street with decaying buildings amid passive onlookers, a dimly lit bar/cafe/teria with a caption describing it as having the "ambience of an Edward Hopper painting" (46), a dark photo of the Malecon (seawall) focusing on a lone Cuban looking away from Havana and a night photo of the five-story-tall image of Che Guevara on a government building at the Plaza of the Revolution.

In the text, Cohen terms the Cuban government "repressive," "oppressive," "ruthless," "totalitarian" and filled with "secrecy" and "obfuscation." "Fidel has been nothing if not a brilliant puppet master" (51). "Fidel's communist revolution, at 50, has carried a terrible price for his people, dividing the Cuban nation, imprisoning part of it and bringing economic catastrophe" (70). While Cohen does pay homage to the revolutionary gains in education and health care, he asks, "Why give them a great education and no life" (51)? Cohen's conversations and anecdotes leave us with the implication that, more than anything, most Cubans would like to leave the island.

Day Three: We make a surprise stop at one of Havana's tree-lined residential neighborhoods, where we enter John Lennon Park. Tourists seeking this park need to be careful not to confuse John with another Lenin, Vladimir, who has a different park named after him, on the outskirts of Havana. Our very knowledgeable guide tells us the story of this park, a tale that reminds us that governments, even one-party governments, can change. In the 1970s, at the height of the Beatles' popularity, many young Cuban men began wearing their hair long, in the style of so many adolescents around the world. The Cuban government frowned on this practice, seeing it as a sign of rebellion, and one day in Havana, the police picked up many of the youths and forcibly gave them haircuts. That action brought outrage from the Cuban population and later shame to the government. Cuba's leaders came to appreciate the politics of the Beatles and Fidel, in particular, was taken by John Lennon's lyrics "They say that I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one." The Cuban government apologized for the forced haircuts; one of those 1970s adolescents is now minister of culture; and a wonderful likeness of John Lenno in bronze now sits on a bench in the park that bears his name. While the statue is respected by Cubans and tourists alike, the slim glasses that grace John's nose have a tendency to be stolen, but today the glasses lie where they belong, and a plainclothes guard keeps his own eye on them. We all enjoy taking pictures of ourselves sitting on the bench and I take the opportunity to offer my hat to John, making him an instant Red Sox fan.

We leave the park to visit CENESEX, the National Center for Sexual Education, located in a beautiful old European-style building in another residential area of Havana. We sit on chairs in a courtyard, an area undergoing renovation, and gaze up at the picture-perfect blue sky while we soak up the warm winter air, temperature in the 70s, just perfect for our mixed Canadian/U.S. group. We had been told that we might meet Mariela Castro Espin, Raul's daughter, a Ph.D. sexologist and director of the center, but in her absence the assistant director greets us, a warm woman in her early 50s, informally dressed, as is the Cuban custom.

At first, the Revolutionary government oppressed homosexuals and women lacked access to safe abortions. During the first years of the AIDS epidemic, the government isolated infected Cubans from the rest of the population, but as knowledge of the disease and tolerance toward its carriers grew, that practice ended. With the development of a universal public health system, medically safe abortions became a woman's right and family planning a dominant part of medical services. While the Communist government has become much more tolerant of religious observance in Cuba, the Catholic Church has generally

lacked power, and the bulk of the religiously practicing population engages in an amalgam of African and Catholic rituals, in a form called *Santería*. The government has gradually come around to recognizing the rights of gay Cubans, and their acceptance stands out as exemplary in comparison with most other Latin American countries. I remember those changing times during my first visit to Cuba in 1998, when the film *Strawberry and Chocolate*, a film that treats a gay writer with respect and understanding, was playing to popular audiences.

And now we meet at this government-sanctioned agency with a mission of educating and fighting homophobia. Its other goals include instituting a change in the Cuban family code recognizing the validity of same-sex families and the elimination of all forms of violence against women. While accurate statistics on domestic violence remain difficult to gather, Professor Nunez believes that the Canadian and U.S. rates surpass that of Cuba. However, with the housing shortage in Cuba, many female victims of violence continue to live with their abusers. And Cuba still lacks "safe houses" for women.

Day Four: We drive ten miles east of central Havana, heading to the Organopónico Vivero Alamar, one of Cuba's most successful urban organic farms. Our bus winds its way through traffic amid the continuing urban environment. We soon round a corner, spot a colorful entrance and exit our bus. We walk into a beautiful green zone, with well-tended farm plots, irrigation pipes, greenhouses, lovely coconut palms, all within sight of high-rise gray-block buildings just past the farm's windmill. An *organopónico* refers to raised-bed farming, each structure roughly 30 square yards, containing soil and compost or other organic material. Specifically oriented to small urban sites, these plots have spread rapidly throughout Cuba. While this farm has *organopónico* in its title, crops planted directly into the ground fill most of its nearly 30 acres.

The cooperative's president, Miguel Salcines, a tall, light-skinned man in his early 70s, greets us. Sitting in the shade, we listen to the story of the farm's history. Salcines himself comes from the upper class, but his family lost its land in the revolutionary agricultural reforms. Salcines subsequently worked as an agronomist in the Agricultural Ministry but in 1997 joined with four other Cubans to start a coop on less than ten acres of what was then termed "wasteland." The coop has done remarkably well since then and has achieved the Cuban classification of "*excelencia*," one of only 82 such farms in the country so designated. From five workers it has grown to a workforce of 170, and its annual production of vegetables has increased from 20 to 240 tons (Koont 54). The coop receives some help from foreign nongovernmental organizations, as well

as the European Union, and in particular, from the German government.

During the 1990s, Cuba moved quickly into organic agriculture after the fall of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc countries cost them the vast bulk of their trade, including their prime source of oil and petrochemicals. All of a sudden, the Cubans lacked the oil-based fertilizer, pesticides and fuel for the tractors that they had traditionally used during the Soviet era. Out of necessity, the Cubans switched to organic agriculture, relying on oxen, not tractors, and learning new/old ways of production, aided by local highly skilled agricultural researchers. Now farmers and researchers from countries around the world come to Cuba to learn how they do it. Salcines joked that the real fathers of organic agriculture in Cuba are Ronald Reagan, for keeping Cuba in the Soviet orbit, and Michael Gorbachev, for finishing off the Soviet Union.

I learned about Cuba's organic "revolution" three or four years ago. A few years before that, on a winter study trip with students to Cuba (just prior to changes mandated by the Bush administration that ended that practice), we visited the agriculturally rich Pinar del Rio Province west of Havana. At one point, we went horseback riding through farmland and I spotted a farmer plowing behind a team of oxen. I thought then that maybe tractors hadn't yet made it out to this area, but as I later realized, they probably had, only to be abandoned during the '90s.

One member of our group, a Saskatchewan farmer, recalls a visit years earlier when his father traveled to Cuba with an agricultural delegation to discuss cattle raising. His father told him that one day when they were about to head out to the fields, Raul Castro, at that time minister of defense, joined the group. I don't think either of us realized how much food production was on Raul's mind, but when I arrived home, I read about his longtime concern over agricultural production. Since the 1970s, the Cubans had been researching ways to increase domestic food production as a matter of national security, since they faced the continuous U.S. blockade and had little in the way of their own petroleum resources. Experiments growing vegetables without oil-based fertilizers proved successful and in December 1987, the use of *organopónicos* began on Cuban army bases, some four years prior to the fall of the Soviet Union! At the end of 1991, with the Soviet Union's demise, *organopónicos* were introduced into Havana and then throughout Cuba (Koont 45-46).

Prior to the Revolution, 80 percent of the population lived in the countryside and 20 percent in the cities, but now we find those percentages reversed. So the need for urban agriculture, to grow the food where the people live, has

become even more vital. In his opening remarks, Miguel Salcines tells us that 53 percent of the rural land is not currently in use, reflecting the reality that most young Cubans do not want to farm nor live in the countryside. Rather, he says they want to work as computer scientists, doctors or musicians.

That problem appears comparable to an even greater one that the Cuban government has been facing for the past decade and a half, a desire on the part of Cuban youth to work in the tourist industry. There, Cuban hotel employees and tour guides can earn higher salaries than doctors, engineers and teachers. While the reforms of the 1990s, which included an expansion of the tourist economy, enabled the Cubans to make it through a very difficult period, it paradoxically brought with it a growing "class" dimension to this socialist state.

Earlier in the fall of 2008, Cuba suffered through three devastating hurricanes, storms that destroyed or damaged 20 percent of the country's homes and wiped out significant agricultural harvests. After viewing the devastation wrought by Hurricane Gustav, Fidel wrote that it reminded him of the leveling of Hiroshima, the result of a nuclear bomb (Castro). We learn that because of the storms, fresh vegetables have only recently become available to most Cubans. We enjoy some of those fresh vegetables at the wonderful lunch that the Vivero Alamar hosts for us, along with a variety of meats and fish, the traditional rice and beans and coconut milk.

Every night in the days leading up to January first, popular bands play in the Anti-Imperialist Tribune, a plaza by the Malecón and directly in front of the U.S. interest section, a seven-story nondescript gray office building. During the Carter administration, when there had been a slight thaw in U.S./Cuban relations, the two countries established relations below the ambassadorial level, leading to interest sections in both capitals. For years, the Cubans have accused the top officials in the interest section of seeking out and financially supporting Cuban dissidents for propaganda purposes. When the U.S. installed an electronic sign on the side of the building that criticized Cuba's human-rights record, the Cubans responded by erecting dozens of flagpoles, placed only a few feet apart in front of the sign, effectively blocking it out. As the 50th anniversary nears, the government hoists Cuban flags on each pole, producing a colorful tableau and effectively blocking any reading of the electronic political messages.

Day Five: We leave Havana, heading east, passing farm cooperatives, orange groves and grazing cattle in Matanzas Province. Soon the terrain becomes more mountainous and we drive through the foothills of the Escambray Mountains,

which dominate Las Villas Province, in the center of Cuba. In 1958, Fidel sent Che to these mountains to defeat Batista's troops and to effectively cut the island in half, thereby bolstering the rebels' hold on the eastern end of Cuba. We visit the Armored Train Museum in Santa Clara, the site where on December 29th, the forces commanded by Che sabotaged the tracks, capturing the train carrying Batista's troops and a huge cache of weapons. Two days later, on New Year's Eve, Batista fled Cuba and the era of Revolutionary rule began.

Santa Clara also boasts a huge statue of Che the *comandante*, in front of the Che Guevara museum and burial site. For many years after Che's death in Bolivia, the location of his burial was unknown, but in 1997, the Bolivian government returned his remains to Cuba. As we walk through the room that contains the burial crypt and an eternal flame, our voices hush as we pause in that sacred space.

Day Six: After spending the previous afternoon and night in Trinidad, a U.N. World Heritage Site, and one of the oldest cities in the Americas, we climb onto old Soviet Army trucks for the motorized trek up the Escambrays to the Topes de Collantes. It's bumpy and cold, but we enjoy the new scenery, reminders of New England pines and ferns, along with more tropical bamboos and eucalyptus trees. We pass small villages and vistas to the Caribbean, now miles and miles away. It feels good to get out of the city. A young man who possesses an encyclopediac knowledge of the flora and fauna that inhabit this lovely land leads us in a most enjoyable exploration of the area. On our walk we spot the dark-red beans on the coffee plants and are treated to a sighting of the colorful Toco-ro-ro, Cuba's national bird.

Day Seven: Up at dawn, we head back to Havana and the José Martí International Airport. Some of our group extends their stay in Cuba while others have different flights to catch. Most of us fly back to Toronto. There we say good-bye to our Canadian friends and the next day head south to home. It's a Sunday and Sheila reads some of the articles in *The New York Times*, just to get up to date. Turns out there's an article on Cuba by Anthony DePalma, and we're soon reminded of the negative stereotypes from the U.S. press that Professor Nunez itemized for us a week ago. DePalma writes that the Cuban Revolution has been an enormous failure, economically, socially and politically. He fails to even give grudging credit to the Cubans for their free and universal systems of health care and education. He seems offended that Raul Castro might want something in exchange from Barack Obama if Castro were to release some political prisoners, especially in exchange for what the author



Havana billboard with photograph of the “Five Heroes,” Cubans imprisoned in the U.S. after infiltrating right-wing exile groups to learn of their terrorist plans for Cuba. (Photograph by the author.)

refers to as “five convicted Cuban spies.” For the Cubans, these are the “Five Heroes,” as we saw from numerous billboards and explanations throughout our visit. They have been imprisoned in Florida for ten years, not for spying on the U.S. government but for infiltrating right-wing Cuban-exile groups to learn of their plans to commit acts of sabotage and terrorism back in Cuba. They entered the U.S. to stop terrorism on Cuban soil, a practice that the CIA and numerous exile groups have engaged in for the past five decades. The U.S. press basically ignores the case. The Cuban government wants the five freed or at least to have a new trial outside the greater-Miami area. Rather than giving his readers any of that voluminous history, DePalma simply refers to the five as “spies.” Absent any context, it then makes sense for DePalma to view Fidel Castro’s hostility to the United States as “pathological.”

The picture of Cuba I bring back home is one of an imperfect society, but one that has done a reasonably good job of taking care of the basic needs of its population—health care, education, food, work and housing. On that level, C. Wright Mills would be impressed with those gains, particularly given the embargo and half century of U.S. hostility. He would likely approve of the Cubans’

ability to push ideology aside and make reforms—even those that smacked of capitalism—to emerge from the Special Period. As he had in 1960, Mills would still worry about Cuba's dependence on that one charismatic leader, though the transition to Raul and, probably more important, the institutionalization of the Revolution's gains might well lighten those concerns. Just before his death, Mills was working on a broader study of Latin America and prospects for revolutionary change. No doubt he would appreciate the shifts to the Left throughout Latin America over the past decade, and the role that Cuba, as a model and an ally, has played in that process.

What is the meaning of Cuba? Cuba has demonstrated that a socialist island can exist and grow in a fiercely capitalist environment. It has managed that, however, by showing a willingness to change, to adjust, even when it goes against its most basic principles. The Cubans have learned from the past, one of Spanish colonialism and of neocolonialism, and of the dangers of overdependence on first the United States and then the Soviet Union. When faced with crisis in the 1990s, the Cubans knew the necessity of change, but they wanted neither to go back to their pre-Revolutionary past nor to endure the "shock treatment" (Klein) accepted by Russia, the former Soviet republics and their Eastern Bloc allies in their rapid transition to the dictates of the "market."

Were Mills alive and offering a new edition of his 1960 broadside, he might very well keep the same title, and hope that this time a rigid U.S. policy toward Cuba might finally change. Raul Castro might well have such a hope as he observes the beginning of the Barack Obama administration in Washington. That hope, or maybe just a wish, allows him to answer the question that an interviewer recently posed to him: Where might he want to meet with the new U.S. president? Raul replies, "Perhaps we could meet at Guantánamo. We must meet and begin to solve our problems, and at the end of the meeting, we could give the president a gift. [We] could send him home with the American flag that waves over Guantánamo Bay" (*Nation* 19).

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Factors Affecting Language Use in Two Franco-American Communities

BY LOUIS E. STELLING

Over the course of the 19th and early-20th centuries, nearly one million French-Canadian immigrants formed tightly knit communities throughout the northeastern United States. Until quite recently, these Franco-Americans were able to maintain their language with surprising vigor through the creation of French-speaking institutions and social networks (Roby 1990, 2000).

Recent self-reports on frequency of language use gathered from interviews with Franco-American consultants in eight locations throughout New England have revealed an interesting contrast between two communities that were once remarkably similar. Despite the many parallels between Southbridge, Massachusetts, and Woonsocket, Rhode Island, the shift from French to English is now more advanced in Southbridge than in any other community studied.

62% of speakers use the language often (18%) or daily (44%) while only 26% claim to use it rarely (20%) or never (6%). When broken down by community, these percentages tend to hold fairly well. . . . In Southbridge on the other hand, less than 20% said they used French daily, while nearly 30% said they never speak it. (Fox 2007, 1285–87)

After comparing and contrasting the two communities, this author seeks to explain the differences observed between Southbridge and Woonsocket through an examination of recent census statistics (1970–2000) and an analysis of data gathered during fieldwork.

Similarities Between the Two Communities

One fact that makes the two communities comparable is that the massive immigration to both places drew relatively homogenous Francophone populations from the same geographical region over roughly the same time period. The first French-Canadian family to settle in Woonsocket came as early as 1814 or 1815 (Bonier 95). Southbridge (which was incorporated only in 1816) saw the arrival of French-Canadian emigrants approximately 17 years later, in 1832 (Gatineau 15; Brown 26). They were joined by friends and family who filled the towns to work in bustling factories. The families who settled in both places came not only from the same rural region of Quebec but from many of the very same small towns. In the 1830s, for example, immigrants from the town of St. Ours in the Richelieu valley settled in high numbers in both locations (Brault 56).

By 1900, Franco-Americans made up 60% of the populations of both Southbridge and Woonsocket (Brault 54–55). Their numbers continued to grow until the 1930s, when the Depression and changing immigration laws ended the arrival of new Francophones (Brault; Roby 1990, 2000; Weil). By this time, French speakers represented a clear majority in both locations, which had become two of New-England's oldest and most well-known Franco-American centers.

Both communities began to show social stratification as Franco-Americans profited from the social mobility afforded them by their majority status. In fact, Franco-American politicians were very active and therefore quite visible in both communities (Brown; Bonier). The presence of several wealthy families from France and Belgium added to the prominence of French in Woonsocket (Bonier 457–58, 466–71).

Franco-Americans promoted the language actively in both locations, creating an impressive number of groups, including mutual societies, social clubs, various sources of media and parish organizations (Brault 99). The Catholic Church played a key role in language maintenance and transmission through bilingual parochial schools made possible by the establishment of Franco-American national parishes. French was also commonly used in places of work such as factories and mills, where Franco-Americans worked together in large numbers (Bonier; Brault; Brown; Gatineau). Complex French-language infrastructures in both places therefore provided a good deal of support for the language at the close of the immigration phase.

Recent Census Figures

Since the 1930s, language shift has been advancing in both communities. French is no longer commonly used at work. The Masses in French and bilingual programs gradually disappeared. Along with the decline of French in work, education and religion, many of the social clubs that had been so important in promoting the language have disappeared (Stelling "Morphosyntactic"). Currently, French is used mainly among family members and friends, and even these domains have been greatly penetrated by English. In other words, there is no longer a single domain that is reserved exclusively for French in either community (Fox and Smith).

Within 40 years of the end of immigration, the percentage of Southbridge residents born in Canada had fallen to only 17.1%, a number that has continued to decline. According to the 1970 United States census, however, the ratio of residents claiming French as a "mother tongue" to those claiming to speak "English only" was still 0.78 : 1. While the question of "mother tongue" does not tell us who was still actually using the language in Southbridge, it is possible to conclude that there were still more than three people who had grown up speaking French to every four monolingual speakers of English.

In Woonsocket, language shift did not advance quite as quickly. In 1970, French-Canadian immigrants represented 26.5% of the total population. While this figure is only slightly elevated when compared with 17.1% in Southbridge, mother-tongue statistics reveal that the French language was maintained in the home to a greater extent by Woonsocket residents. Nearly 27,000 of these claimed French as a mother tongue, while the "English only" group numbered fewer than 14,000 in 1970. Thus, there were nearly twice as many people who had grown up speaking French as there were who spoke only English. Because

immigration had ceased 40 years earlier, this shows that transmission of the French language in Woonsocket must have been considerably more common than in Southbridge between 1930 and 1970. The resulting situation was that while Francophones had already become a minority in Southbridge, they were still the majority in Woonsocket.

U.S. census reports from 1990 and 2000 (see table 1) confirm that a greater percentage of Woonsocket residents declared French or French-Canadian ancestry as well as French use in the home in both years. However, both communities are changing dramatically. Residents declaring French ancestry fell from 55.1% to 40.3% in Woonsocket and from 40.5% to 30.2% in Southbridge. French use in the home fell from 19.6% to 9.9% in Woonsocket and from 8.5% to only 5.4% in Southbridge.

If we compare Woonsocket in 2000 with Southbridge in 1990, we can notice approximately 40% French ancestry in both cases and that percentages of French home use are similar (9.9% vs. 8.5%). Although language shift is currently less advanced in Woonsocket than in Southbridge, the two are clearly following the same path. In Southbridge, language shift is so advanced that fewer than 700 people reported use of French in the home in 2000. Moreover, not a single one was under the age of 18. In other words, language transmission ceased in the community at least one full generation ago.

Differences Between the Two Communities

These census figures themselves suggest one possible explanation for the fact that language shift has progressed at different rates in the two communities. In terms of its total population, Woonsocket is and has always been significantly larger than Southbridge. Although the compositions of these communities remained nearly identical even after the end of the immigration period, Woonsocket may be more resistant to language shift due to its size as the location has consistently been home to a greater number of French speakers.

In addition to the size of these communities, another difference between Woonsocket and Southbridge is not found in statistics but rather in attitudes expressed toward language and assimilation. While both communities show conservative language attitudes and a low level of esteem for their variety of French as compared with others (Fox *Variation*; Stelling "Attitudes"; Bagaté), they differ in the value that Franco-American residents have placed on incorporating English into their lives.

In Southbridge, local politician, historian and activist Félix Gattineau was

very involved in encouraging French-Canadian immigrants to be naturalized and assert their newfound rights as Americans through the early 20th century. The Franco-American hero founded the *Club de Naturalisation* in 1892 with the goal of introducing French-Canadian immigrants to the laws of the United States. One Southbridge native and French speaker (SO01) comments:

The French Canadian especially had a great influence in the development of Southbridge, business-wise politically also . . . tremendous . . . and thanks to Felix of course a lot of this took place because he saw to it that French Canadians . . . have a better life and prosper.

Mr. Gatineau was certainly a champion of the Franco-American community and an important historical figure in the town of Southbridge. His statue stands today, just across from Notre-Dame church in the Globe Village, one of the two Franco-American neighborhoods in town. The goals set forth by the naturalization club and the general attitude promoted in town at the onset of the 20th century may have in fact encouraged Franco-Americans to assimilate to American society in order to benefit as much as possible from the social and economic opportunities available to them.

Although the abandonment of French itself was not specifically a goal of the club, the importance that Franco-Americans in Southbridge placed on adopting English may explain why language shift would advance more quickly there than in Woonsocket, where attitudes were more hostile toward linguistic assimilation at the end of the immigration period.

In fact, Woonsocket was at the heart of a five-year quarrel that pitted moderate and militant Franco-Americans against each other during the late 1920s, just as the massive immigration from Quebec was coming to an end (Roby 2000, 238–65). This movement was named the Sentinelle affair after a French-language newspaper established in 1924 by the militant Elphège J. Daignault and his followers, who quickly began to draw support from other Franco-American centers in New England (Brault 87–88; Sorrell 342–43).

[These Sentinellists] felt that *la survivance*, which their ancestors in Quebec had fought so long to maintain, was being threatened . . . these militant Francos identified the principal “Americanizing” threat as the Irish hierarchy of the Catholic Church. They felt that the Irish took advantage of their dominant position within the Church by attempting to force Catholic immigrant groups who arrived later than most Irish, and unlike them did not speak English, to quickly

assimilate themselves. Daignault et al. also distrusted increasing centralization of diocesan activities which, they felt, threatened the autonomy of individual Franco-American parishes. (Sorrell 343)

These Sentinellists, who demanded that French be placed on equal footing with English in Franco-American schools, became increasingly aggressive in their campaigns. After militants petitioned Rome and were refused support by the Pope, they brought a civil suit against the Church and promptly engaged in a boycott of all monetary contributions such as pew rentals (Sorrell 343–44; Roby 2000, 256–57).

Only after the 1928 excommunication of 62 of those who had initiated or supported a civil suit against Bishop William Hickey would these campaigns come to a close. When every one of the excommunicated signed repentance forms in 1929, the movement officially died (Brault 88).

However, while the movement was no longer active after the 1920s, the feelings stirred up by the Sentinelle affaire were far from extinguished:

The Sentinellists struck a responsive chord in many ordinary Franco-Americans: at the height of the crisis, in 1927, approximately ten thousand turned out for a protest rally in Woonsocket. The controversy is far from forgotten today. . . . (Brault 88)

The Sentinelle affair marked a breaking point for support for the French language by the Catholic Church in New England. Since the 1930s, faith or allegiance to the Catholic Church and mother-tongue maintenance are no longer one and the same for Franco-Americans (Brault; Roby 1990, 2000). Interestingly, this author has not been able to locate a single mention of any involvement in the Sentinelle affair by prominent Southbridge residents or organizations.

Thus, while the Franco-American communities of Southbridge and Woonsocket were formed in a parallel fashion, by identical percentages of immigrants from the same locations over the same time period, key differences began to emerge at the same time that immigration was ending. In Southbridge, attitudes toward adopting English were generally positive, whereas Woonsocket residents remained very much divided on the issue, with a core of militants whose loyalty to their mother tongue was nothing short of impressive.

Results of Fieldwork

Southbridge and Woonsocket are two of eight New England communities targeted in a collaborative sociolinguistic research project led by professors Cynthia

Fox (University at Albany) and Jane Smith (University of Maine, Orono). During fieldwork, interviews were conducted with at least 30 Franco-Americans from each community, 275 in all. Interviews were guided by use of a questionnaire to gather information on topics such as the acquisition, use and transmission of French and access to Francophone culture and media. A translation task (English to French) was also used to elicit structures that are infrequent in conversation. As shown in table 2.1, the Southbridge corpus consists of interviews with 35 consultants. These 19 men and 16 women range in age from 44 to 92. The 34 consultants interviewed in Woonsocket (see table 2.2) are 15 men and 19 women between the ages of 25 and 86.

Consultants were divided into five categories based on their self-reports on frequency of language use. As shown in table 3, 11 speakers (16%) claim that they never use French. Nineteen (28%) rarely use the language. On rare occasions, these informants speak French but only with certain family members or friends. Seven consultants (10%) report occasional use of French. On average, these consultants speak French no more than once per week or have very few people with whom they consistently use the language. Ten speakers (14%) use the language frequently, or several times per week, with a number of people. The largest group (32%) consists of 22 speakers who claim to use French every day.

These categories were assigned numerical values representing their order from zero (never) to four (daily). By averaging these scores, patterns in frequency of language use were identified for Southbridge and Woonsocket with respect to the following speaker characteristics: age, sex, number of generations in the U.S., employment status (professional vs. working class), language(s) of schooling, language transmission, type of marriage (endolingual vs. exolingual) and community of residence. Once these patterns were verified, a binomial analysis was performed in order to explain which of these factors have the most determinant effect on frequent or daily use of French among these 69 consultants.

Patterns in Frequency of Language Use

Frequency of language use (table 3) among consultants reveals an important contrast between the two communities. In Woonsocket, 65% (n=22) of informants use French often (n=6) or daily (n=16), compared with only 28% (n=10) in Southbridge. Also, 63% (n=22) of Southbridge speakers rarely or never use French, compared with 24% (n=8) in Woonsocket. When language-use-frequency scores were averaged for both communities, the mean score

among all 69 consultants was 2.19. Comparatively, Southbridge speakers had an average score of only 1.54, whereas Woonsocket speakers averaged 2.85.

The speaker distributions by age (shown in table 4) reveal another interesting contrast between Southbridge and Woonsocket. In terms of age, in both corpora speakers in their 70s are the most common and speakers under the age of 50 are quite rare. We can also see that the relationship between age and language use is not perfectly linear. Rather, it follows a bell shape, with speakers in their 60s using French the most often. In addition, speakers above the age of 60 report that they use French more frequently than younger speakers, and French speakers under the age of 50 are quite rare. These speakers use French the least, with an average of only 1.75. Speakers from ages 50 to 59 use French somewhat more, but still rarely to occasionally on the whole (mean = 1.86). Speakers in their 60s use French much more often (often to daily) than their younger counterparts, averaging 3.08. Speakers in their 70s use French occasionally to often, with a mean average of 2.16, which is very close to the mean of 2.19 observed overall. The oldest speakers, who are in their 80s and 90s, use French occasionally, at 2.00, but still more than both groups below the age of 60.

Although elderly informants do speak French more than speakers under 60, we might expect the very oldest speakers to use the language the most. However, for many of these older speakers, use of French with friends is becoming increasingly rare as members of their social networks either stop using the language themselves or simply pass away. Speaker SO07 commented, "I have a lot of friends that are French, French people, we never speak French though . . . some of them can't speak it anymore." Speaker SO15, who was 86 on the day of the interview (and is now deceased), commented that it is difficult to find others his age to speak with other than his wife, as most of their friends have passed away or aren't in good enough health to be mobile. He said, "*Aujourd'hui c'est fini . . . peut-être on est parmi les derniers qui parlent autant comme on parle*" ("Today it's over . . . we might be among the last who speak as much as we do"). This situation most likely explains why speakers in their 60s showed a higher frequency of French-language use than did the oldest informants.

Table 5 shows sex by frequency of use of French and by community. Although there are more females than males in Woonsocket and more males than female speakers in Southbridge, the corpora are quite well balanced in terms of sex when combined. The 34 men interviewed appear to use French much less frequently than the 35 female consultants. Women showed a mean score of 2.49, whereas men averaged only 1.88.

Number of generations in the United States (table 6) also provided interesting results. Speakers were broken down into four generations as follows: (1) immigrants, (2) one or both of their parents were immigrants, (3) both of their parents were born on American soil and (4) their grandparents were born in the United States. Franco-Americans who are themselves immigrants used the language the most, with a mean score of 3.33. Consultants whose parents immigrated from Canada showed an average of 2.28. Informants who are the grandchildren of immigrants used the language much less than the previous two generations, with an average of only 1.29.

There were only three speakers whose grandparents were not born in Canada. All three individuals were very enthusiastic, going out of their way to incorporate the French language into their lives. Consequently, they used French more (mean = 2.67) than did any of the other American-born informants. Aside from these three, however, we see a clear pattern in which each group uses French less frequently than the preceding generation.

Speakers were also grouped according to whether they were working-class or professionals. Working-class consultants earned their living through manual labor or in another field in which no college education was required. All those who were required to attend college were labeled as professional class. Table 7 shows that working-class speakers used French more frequently, with an average of 2.61, than professional-class informants, who averaged only 1.68.

Unlike speakers in many language death situations such as that of Cajun French, for example (Rottet), consultants from Woonsocket and Southbridge are literate in both French and English. The bilingual school programs (which 56 of the 69 speakers attended) are largely responsible for this. Additionally, many younger speakers have studied French in high school or college. Of the 69 consultants interviewed in Southbridge and Woonsocket, all have had some education in English and all but one have had some formal education in French.

As we can see in table 8, ten speakers have studied French only as a second or foreign language. They use French fairly infrequently on the whole, averaging only 1.1. Twenty-two speakers have had both bilingual schooling and French in a second-language classroom. They speak French more than those without any bilingual schooling but still averaged only 1.82, falling short of the overall average of 2.19 found in these communities. Interestingly, informants who have had bilingual schooling and have never been in an L2 classroom use French more frequently than the previous groups, with a mean score of 2.60. The last

group consists of speakers who have had French as a sole medium of instruction at some point in their lives. All but two siblings (SO08 and SO09) had also had bilingual schooling. These speakers use French often to daily, with an average of 3.18. Regardless of whether or not they have had bilingual schooling, those who have had French in an L2 setting (mean = 1.10 for L2 only and 1.82 for bilingual + L2) used French less frequently than those who were never exposed to French as it is taught in a foreign-language classroom.

Speakers were also classified according to the extent to which they have transmitted French to their children. As we look at the relationship between language transmission and frequency of language use by parents, a clear cause-and-effect chain is hard to establish. High frequency of language use could promote transmission just as transmission could raise frequency of language use for parents. On one hand, frequent use of French in the home encourages language transmission. On the other hand, by passing their mother tongue along to the next generation, some parents in this corpus have created opportunities to speak French while others have not. Additionally, we are looking at total frequency of language use today, and not use in the home when these parents were raising their children. Nonetheless, we can see a clear pattern emerge in table 9 if we look at the relationship between language use and language transmission.

Thirty-five consultants have transmitted some amount of French to their children. Fifteen speakers have at least one child who speaks French. Twenty have at least one child who understands French but does not speak it. These two groups showed very similar average frequencies of language use at 2.87 and 2.85, respectively, both well above the overall average of 2.19. The remaining 34 did not transmit any French to their children or did not have children at all. This last group speaks French only rarely to occasionally, with an average score of only 1.50.

The last speaker characteristic taken into account in this analysis (see table 10) is type of marriage. Thirty-five speakers married other French speakers. These consultants speak French often, with an average score of 2.71. The remaining 34 did not marry other French speakers. This latter group can be divided into 18 who married non-French speakers (frequency mean = 1.56) and those who are not married (frequency mean = 1.75). Regardless of whether informants are single or married to a non-Francophone, they use French, only rarely to occasionally. In other words, they speak the language much less frequently than those who did marry another French speaker.

Statistical Analysis

Interestingly, each and every one of the eight speaker characteristics considered here demonstrates an observable pattern with respect to language maintenance. Because of the ordinal nature of the 0-to-4 scale, however, these mean averages can serve only to highlight apparent relationships. Correlations were thus examined between each of these factors and frequency of language use using version 11 of SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). In every case, the direction of these correlations confirmed the patterns identified above. When a significant test was administered, six of the eight correlations were significant beyond the 0.05 level and a seventh showed a possible trend. A logistic regression of the data was then performed in order to account for interaction among competing or confounding factors. Our research question was the following: Which factors favor frequent or daily use of French? The significance level of the final analysis was 0.008.

As shown in table 11, three factor groups (speaker characteristics) were selected as having a significant effect on frequent or daily use of French. These were the languages of schooling, employment status and community of residence.

Language of schooling was chosen as the most-determinant-factor group. French as a medium of instruction strongly favors the use of French. Bilingual schooling also favors frequent language use, but to a lesser extent. Both factors involving French as a second language (French as L2 only and bilingual schooling plus French as L2) had a negative impact on language use. Working vs. professional class was the secondmost-determinant-factor group. Working-class status strongly favors frequent or daily use of French, while professional-class status strongly disfavors use of the language. Community of residence was the thirdmost-influential-factor group. Compared with consultants from Southbridge, informants from Woonsocket are much more likely to use French with high frequency.

Discussion

When we consider the three factor groups selected here, one striking link between them is the notion of language attitudes. In the United States, English is the language of power, prestige and financial opportunity. While it may have been true a century ago that French was a useful tool in the workplace in both of these communities, that is rarely the case today. While some blue-collar Franco-Americans may be surrounded by other French speakers at work, that is not the

case for the professional class living in these communities. Due to the absence of monolingual speakers of French, English is seen by Franco-Americans as the only language necessary for social and economic advancement today.

The history of the French language (especially in education) is riddled with grammatical proscription (Chaurand; Perret). Many of the speakers in this corpus have had very negative experiences due to hostile attitudes toward their mother tongue in French L2 classrooms. It is altogether unsurprising that having been exposed to standard French, which speakers often refer to as "Parisian French," in a foreign-language classroom, where the teacher is rarely Franco-American, has had a negative impact on language maintenance.

The crucial difference in the development of these communities is that since the 1930s, the shift from French to English has been accelerated in Southbridge when compared with Woonsocket. A much smaller community, the Francophones of Southbridge showed a relatively strong will to become naturalized and to assimilate into American society from the very beginning of the 20th century. While the Francophones of Southbridge have become a fairly invisible minority in the town, with little support for their mother tongue, the French language enjoys a certain amount of support in Woonsocket, a city whose population widely recognizes its Franco-American heritage.

Conclusion

The patterns identified in the pages above underscore the highly complex nature of the shift from French to English in Southbridge, Massachusetts, and Woonsocket, Rhode Island. Several qualitative studies of these and other Franco-American communities have suggested that language attitudes may be a determining factor in language shift (Fox 1995, 2005; Fox and Smith; Fox et al; Bagaté; Stelling 2007). It is therefore quite interesting that results from a quantitative analysis of data gathered during fieldwork confirm this notion.

Not only are Franco-Americans facing the spread of English but their mother tongue is also a stigmatized variety of French. Having been brought from France to Canada before the French Revolution, and then to the U.S. before the French-Canadian cultural revolution, the language as it exists in New England lacks prestige. It is seen even by many Franco-Americans as ungrammatical, archaic, peppered with English and even impractical. It is likely that a great number of Franco-Americans (especially those having experienced attrition or imperfect acquisition of their mother tongue) may consequently be abandoning their language rather than continuing to use what they have been taught to see as "bad" French.

Table 1 Ancestry and French Use in the Home 1990–2000

		1990		2000*		Change	
Woonsocket, RI	Population	43,877		43,224		- 653	- 1.5 %
	French Ancestry	24,177	55.1 %	17,410	40.3 %	- 6,767	-28.0 %
	French at Home	8,614	19.6 %	4,386	9.9 %	- 4,228	-49.1 %
Southbridge, MA	Population	13,631		12,878		- 753	- 5.5 %
	French Ancestry	5,526	40.5 %	3,885	30.2 %	- 1,641	-29.7 %
	French at Home	1,158	8.5 %	698	5.4 %	- 460	-39.7 %

*In 2000, no French home speakers under 18 were reported in Southbridge. Only 53 were reported in Woonsocket. These figures are not available for 1990.

Table 2.1 Southbridge: Characteristics of the Informants

Speaker	Age/Sex	Place of Birth	Generations in the U.S. (mat./pat.)
SO11	92M	Southbridge, MA	2/3
SO17	90M	Southbridge	2/2
SO15	86M	Southbridge	2/2
SO16	86F	Southbridge	2/2
SO02	84M	Southbridge	3/3
SO03	83F	Southbridge	2/2
SO19	83F	Southbridge	3/2
SO14	82F	Southbridge	2/2
SO20	81M	Southbridge	3/3
SO13	80M	Southbridge	3/2
SO21	79M	Southbridge	2/2
SO-S11	79F	Southbridge	2/2
SO-S6	77F	Southbridge	2/3
SO-S10	77M	Southbridge	3/2
SO07	77F	Southbridge	2/2
SO18	76M	Southbridge	2/2
SO10	76F	Southbridge	2/2
SO23	74M	Sanford, ME	3?4?/2
SO-S9	74F	Southbridge	3/3
SO04	73F	Southbridge	3/4
SO05	73M	Southbridge	2/2
SO01	62M	Southbridge	4/Irish
SO12	62F	Southbridge	2/3
SO-S5	62M	Worcester, MA	Irish/4
SO22	61M	Southbridge	3/3
SO09	61M	Rigaud, Qc	1
SO08	59F	Rigaud	1
SO-S1	59M	Worcester	4/3
SO-S8	56F	Southbridge	4/3
SO-S4	54M	Southbridge	3?4?/3
SO-S2	53F	Southbridge	3?4?/3?4?
SO06	53M	Ware, MA	2/2
SO24	50F	VanBuren, ME	2/3
SO-S3	50F	Southbridge	3/3
SO-S7	44M	Southbridge	3/3

Table 2.2 Woonsocket: Characteristics of the Informants

Speaker	Age/Sex	Place of Birth	Generations in the U.S. (mat./pat.)
WO26	86 F	Québec, QC	1
WO03	82 F	Nashua, NH	3
WO21	82 M	Woonsocket, RI	2/3
WOS1	82 F	Central Falls, RI	2
WOS2	79 M	Tourcoing, FR	1
WO16	77 M	Woonsocket	2/3
WO29	77 F	Woonsocket	3
WO23	76 M	Woonsocket	3/2
WO22	76 M	Woonsocket	2
WO01	75 F	Rivière-du-Loup, QC	
WO20	74 M	Woonsocket	3/2
WO27	72 F	Woonsocket	2
WO02	72 M	Woonsocket	2
WO07	72 M	Woonsocket	3
WO15	71 F	Woonsocket	2
WO19	71 M	Woonsocket	2/3
WOS4	70 M	Greenville, NH	3
WOS3	70 F	Pawtucket, RI	2
WO06	69 F	Woonsocket	1
WO24	68 F	Woonsocket	1
WO08	67 M	Frampton, QC	1
WO18	66 M	Woonsocket	2/3
WO09	65 F	Providence, RI	2
WO05	61 F	Woonsocket	2/1
WO10	61 F	Woonsocket	2
WO04	59 F	Blackstone, MA	2
WO13	59 F	Woonsocket	2/3
WO30	59 F	Woonsocket	3
WO28	58 F	Woonsocket	4
WO14	53 M	Woonsocket	3/2
WO12	52 F	Woonsocket	2
WO17	49 F	Woonsocket	2/3
WO25	38 M	Woonsocket	2/3
WO11	25 M	Woonsocket	4/3

Table 3 Frequency of French by Community of Residence

	Language Use	Southbridge	Woonsocket	Total
0	Never	10 (29%)	1 (3%)	11 (16%)
1	Rarely	12 (34%)	7 (21%)	19 (28%)
2	Occasionally	3 (9%)	4 (12%)	7 (10%)
3	Often	4 (11%)	6 (18%)	10 (14%)
4	Daily	6 (17%)	16 (47%)	22 (32%)
	Average	1.54/4	2.85/4	2.19/4

Table 4 Age by Frequency of French and Community of Residence

Age	Southbridge	Woonsocket	Total	Frequency of French
80+	10	4	14	2.00
70+	11	14	25	2.16
60+	5	7	12	3.08
50+	8	6	14	1.86
<50	1	3	4	1.75
Total	35	34	69	2.19

Table 5 Sex by Frequency of French and Community of Residence

Sex	Southbridge	Woonsocket	Total	Frequency of French
Male	19	15	34	1.88
Female	16	19	35	2.49
Total	35	34	69	2.19

Table 6 Number of Generations in the U.S.* by Frequency of French and Community of Residence

Generation	Southbridge	Woonsocket	Total	Frequency of French
1	2	7	9	3.33
2	20	20	40	2.28
3	11	6	17	1.29
4	2	1	3	2.67
				(all 3 are anomalies)
Total	35	34	69	2.19

*The most recent generation was used here.

Table 7 Employment Class by Frequency of French and Community of Residence

Class	Southbridge	Woonsocket	Total	Frequency of French
Working	18	20	38	2.61
Professional	17	14	31	1.68
Total	35	34	69	2.19

Table 8 Language(s) of Schooling by Frequency of French and Community of Residence

Language(s) of Schooling	Southbridge	Woonsocket	Total	Frequency of French
English only	1	0	1	0
				(only one speaker)
French as L2	6	4	10	1.10
Bilingual and L2	13	9	22	1.82
Bilingual	11	14	25	2.60
French as sole medium	4	7	11	3.18
Total	35	34	69	2.19

Table 9 Language Transmission by Frequency of French and Community of Residence

Transmission	Southbridge	Woonsocket	Total	Frequency of French
Yes	7	8	15	2.87
Partial	9	11	20	2.85
No	19	15	34	1.50
Total	35	34	69	2.19

Table 10 Type of Marriage by Frequency of French and Community of Residence

Marriage	Southbridge	Woonsocket	Total	Frequency of French
Endolinguistic	14	21	35	2.71
Exolinguistic	10	8	18	1.56
Single	11	5	16	1.75
Total	35	34	69	2.19

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Book Review Essay

Does History Matter?

BY ROBERT BENCE

Lincoln President-Elect: "Abraham Lincoln and the Great Secession Winter 1860–1861," by Harold Holzer

Simon & Schuster, 2008

Does history matter? Of course it does, but how? This review focuses on a variation of that question — are there parallels between historic and recent events that provide, if not actual lessons, at least valuable perspectives? Abraham Lincoln's 200th birthday has been marked by a plethora of Lincoln articles and books, most notably Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals: "The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln."* This well-researched and -written tome sparked both scholarly and television-talking-head comparisons of Lincoln's choice of cabinet members with those of Barack Obama, especially their respective selections of party nomination rivals of William H. Seward and Hillary R. Clinton for secretary of state. The latest fodder to tempt presidential comparisons is *Lincoln President-Elect: "Abraham Lincoln and the Great Secession Winter 1860–1861."* Historian Harold Holzer has meticulously documented the nationally tense four-month period between Lincoln's election on November 6, 1860, and his inaugural address on March 4, 1861. True to the principles of

the historian's craft, Holzer makes no references to future presidents and limits the scope of his research to this dramatic and anxious one-third year in the life of Lincoln and the rapidly disintegrating country. Holzer's only major point, which he more than adequately demonstrates, is refuting the oft-made charge that Lincoln passively waited in Springfield to take his office. While this period and its president are uniquely fascinating, a reader's mind can easily slip to a search for Lincoln/Obama parallels.

The superficial similarities of these presidents-elect and their transition periods abound. Both are former legislators from Illinois. Election turnout for each was extremely high. As candidates, they each had well-organized brigades of supporters who continued their procandidate activities after the elections. They both succeeded extremely unpopular lame-duck presidents who seemed paralyzed by the state of their nation. The two men had contentious and competitive battles to win their party nominations, and there was constant media speculation about whom they would choose for supporting casts in their cabinets. Their first ladies are both intriguing and influential policy advisors to their spouses. Both Lincoln and Obama had no shortage of constant pressure from politicians and groups who were trying to move them in opposite directions on major issues of the day. Obama and Lincoln each proposed legislation before they actually assumed office and attempted to reach out to their political opponents in a spirit of conciliation. Both 1860 and 2008 saw the United States in times of troubles, and both presidents were burdened with great expectations of supporters and trepidations of critics. Both 1861 and 2009 called out for decisive, tempered and wise leadership.

But these parallels are indeed superficial, and century-separated contexts mean that history, even with George Santayana's warning about ignoring the past at our peril duly noted, never exactly repeats itself. While the pain of our present recession and two-front wars have serious consequences for individuals and the nation, we are not facing a civil war. By the time Lincoln took office, seven Southern states had seceded. And the pros and cons of the Troubled Asset Relief Program do not tear at the fabric of American society as slavery did. Comparing Lincoln, Obama and their eras is definitely mixing historical apples and oranges. To extend the metaphor, it is a fruitless task.

Lincoln's life between election and inauguration was not only two months longer than Obama's but infinitely more complex and pressurized. He was elected by only 40% of the popular vote, winning no Southern states, where often he was not even on the ballot. Lincoln did not have the luxury of choosing

his vice president, Maine Senator Hannibal Hamlin, whom he met only once before the election. Following 19th-century customs, the president-elect had not campaigned publically for either the nomination or the election, so he had to introduce himself to his citizens. This required a well-organized long train trip with impromptu whistle-stop speeches from Springfield to Washington, D.C. And he was in competition with Jefferson Davis, who was taking his mirror-image preinaugural trip to become the president of the Confederacy. While it is difficult to identify objective media sources in the early 21st century, it was impossible in 1860–61. Newspapers were overtly partisan and Lincoln was vilified in all the Southern press and many Northern editorials. There was rarely a day during the four months when he was not besieged by inane claims of patronage seekers, and leaders from all parties implored him to compromise on his refusal to extend slavery to new states and territories to save the Union. In Springfield, Lincoln, always the receptive and usually jovial listener, seemingly turned away no request for an audience, no matter how demanding, unqualified or uninformed. The famous and infamous were welcomed. His only respite in those months was a quick trip to the Illinois plains to see his stepmother for the last time. And he always had to worry that the Electoral College might not even constitutionally legitimize his election in February. Although once seceded Southern state congressmen left D.C., Lincoln had to be less concerned about losing the presidency if the House of Representatives had to make the decision.

While Obama's process of filling cabinet posts was no doubt difficult, and certainly highly scrutinized, his task was simple compared with the immense pressure Lincoln was under. Should he include the rivals for the presidential nomination? How much regional balance should he seek? Should there be a border-state member? Holzer details this quandary and offers explanations of why Lincoln chose only one cabinet member, Seward as secretary of state, till right before his inauguration. Any early choices would convey a variety of signals that would have handicapped Lincoln's presidency before it began.

By now, most of us have become immune to presidential death threats, but in 1860–61, they were more numerous and widely supported, especially by white Southerners who saw Lincoln's election as the beginning of a national apocalypse. The most real threat involved a conspiracy to assassinate Lincoln in Baltimore on his public-relations train trip to Washington. On the advice of General Winfield Scott, the Baltimore stop was canceled, and Lincoln had to counter the charges of being a coward by participating in more public events in Washington.

Unlike today, Lincoln wrote his own speeches and inaugural address. Occasionally his off-the-cuff speeches were "oft-message," as when on his train excursion he contradicted himself by first saying the Southern seizing of federal property was a crisis, then announcing it was not. But with the inaugural address, he took great time and care in writing and rewriting, knowing that his first official words might determine the fate of the country. He was careful to conceal his thoughts from all but a chosen few advisers, though at the last minute he accepted Seward's suggestions to tone down the tough rhetoric in hope of pacifying Southern unionists.

Holzer's extensive documentation does, indeed, demonstrate that Lincoln had an active and involved four months in preparing himself and his administration for what seems like an impossible task. So, other than gain an even greater appreciation for Lincoln and his challenges, can we learn anything from an in-depth reading of his preparation to assume the presidency during the greatest crisis in U.S. history? Does Holzer's book help us understand what criteria we as citizens and observers can use to evaluate presidential personalities and modes of decision-making? Possibly.

What stands out in this description of Lincoln's four months as president-elect are three characteristics that can serve any leader well, and could be used to judge current and future presidents. First, Lincoln had a sense of humor that allowed him to sanely navigate the choppy waters of contradictory demands of the rational and irrational visitors to Springfield. His homey anecdotes about marriage disarmed and often impressed the pompous, gently making his points and demonstrating in a nonpretentious manner that he understood both the concerns of others and the seriousness of tasks at hand. A president can be intelligent without arrogance or aloofness. Directly insulting even the most disagreeable individuals does little to promote dialogue and understanding.

In the same carefully constructed manner, Lincoln attempted to reach out to those who thought the Republican platform toward slavery had to be modified in order to avoid national disintegration. Lincoln and his party consistently held slavery to be morally wrong but were willing to attempt to guarantee slave-state governments maximum discretion to retain the "peculiar institution." But Lincoln drew the line on Southern demand to extend slavery to territories and new states. From a Frederick Douglass abolitionist perspective (and a 20th-century one), a middle ground on slavery was indefensible, but Lincoln felt he had to at least make some attempt to retain the Union. It was his duty.

Finally, Lincoln was clearly a religious person, and his communication and speeches almost always contained biblical and Almighty references. But he expressed disdain for those proslavery opponents he believed invoked Christianity for non-Christian purposes. He was a humble servant, not a self-assured crusader. And when he sought to justify his actions or policy recommendations, he appropriately located his authority in the U.S. Constitution.

With the knowledge of postinauguration history, it is easy to fault Lincoln's reluctance to draw an absolute line in the sand of secession and slavery. But Holzer's description of Lincoln's postelection months is a reminder that even great presidents cannot control events. Sometimes the best they can do is stay involved, listen well, choose words carefully and hold on to basic principles and the concept of constitutional government. That may be the most important lesson we can take from Holzer's description of Lincoln's four-month preparation for the presidency.

Contributors

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Roy Carroll, former professor and university administrator, earned his M.A. and Ph.D. in history at Vanderbilt University. He was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Leeds in England. His teaching career included a decade at Mercer and Armstrong State universities in Georgia and a decade as chair of the department and I. G. Greer Distinguished Professor of History at Appalachian State University. His teaching was followed by two decades as vice president for planning, vice president for academic affairs and senior vice president for the multicampus University of North Carolina. He also served one year as chancellor of UNC-Asheville. Since his retirement in 1999, he has continued to work with the Distinguished Professors Endowment Trust Fund of the University of North Carolina.

David L. Langston teaches literature, film and critical theory at MCLA. Many years ago, while doing research on the thought of Charles Sanders Peirce, he noted that both Darwin and Marx had published landmark texts in the year Peirce graduated from Harvard. Since then, he has come to regard the other signal events of 1859 as persistently pointing toward a profound transformation in modernity that could be summed up with Max Weber's convenient phrase "the routinization of charisma"—a concept that he says should be adapted to denote a culturewide fascination with harnessing the untamed

natural energies that midcentury thinkers saw impinging on the cultural order from every side.

Mark D. Miller has taught literature and writing at MCLA since 1986 and currently serves as chairperson of the English/Communications Department. He edits *rWp: An Annual of Robert Penn Warren Studies* and is an active member of the Robert Penn Warren Circle and the Advisory Group of the Center for Robert Penn Warren Studies at Western Kentucky University. He is also a published poet and has just completed his first novel.

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THE MIND'S EYE

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